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GAMES AND PASTIMES OF THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL

by



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A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Games and Pastimes of the Australian Aboriginal," submitted by Michael Albert Salter in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to categorise the indigenous games and pastimes of the Australian aboriginal with respect to the major aspects of his culture, and to classify them according to their predominant characteristics.

To develop a conceptual structure into which the aboriginals' recreational activities could be accommodated, selected literature in the fields of physical education, cultural anthropology and sociology was reviewed, in order to evaluate the merits and shortcomings of the existing methods of viewing and classifying play.

The resultant framework was constructed by determining the dominant aspects of this culture, and the individual characteristics of the discovered play activities. The games and pastimes of the Australian aboriginals were then classified accordingly and a description of each given.

It was found that the greatest number of games and pastimes were associated with the aboriginals' economic life. These, together with the play activities associated with the other aspects of his culture, tended to be of a group nature, rather than of an individual or team type. Similarly, the majority of discovered recreational activities involved dexterity and/or imitation on the part of the participant. In contrast, games and pastimes involving an element of chance were in the minority.

Generally speaking, the simply structured leisure time activities of the native Australian permitted maximum participation. This resulted

from a lack of emphasis on competition and victory, easily comprehended rules and unrestricted team or group membership.

His play then, revolving around aspects of his culture, served not only as a source of enjoyment and relaxation, but as a medium of informal learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

"The tools men use or the food they eat may determine the chances for survival of a people; the games they play or the stories they read may establish the character of a nation."¹

This statement, and the many others expressing a similar concept, has undoubtedly intrigued those concerned with shaping the destiny of their nation, particularly persons involved in the educative process. Unfortunately, the majority of physical educators, who have a vital role to play in this process, have been content to leave the study of play in society to other disciplines, while they themselves expand previously pioneered areas of their own lexicon.

As the relationship between play and education becomes more apparent, the task of establishing the function of play in society, and its character-structuring role, becomes the responsibility of the physical educator and recreator.

In order to accomplish this task, he must not only understand the place of play in extant alien societies but also in extinct cultures, both indigenous and foreign, for as Strayer stated, ". . . no institution can function without constant reference to past experiences."²

¹J. R. Strayer (ed.), The Interpretation of History (New York: Peter Smith, 1950), p. 6.

²Ibid., p. 9.

Play is an integral part of the cultural patterns of a society, and where absent or limited may result in the evolution of undesirable social traits. Through an understanding of the methods employed by various cultures to combat their social ills, ". . . we may be in a better position to understand our own society, its contradictions and failures, its achievements and its values."³

It is highly conceivable that students of the "leisure time" problem may glean some solutions from the play life, amusements, games and dances of the various cultures.

An examination of other civilisations may lead the researcher to discover that his own culture has been considerably influenced by them. Once aware of the various factors that are involved in the differentiation of one society from another, he should see the possibilities inherent in such studies with relation to the fields of physical education and recreation.

The investigator is, however, confronted with a substantial task in compiling and analysing the existent material, the majority of which has been documented by scholars outside the realm of physical education.

This particular study then, in expanding one area of the existing body of knowledge in the field, may assist researchers to determine the inter-relationships between physical education and other social phenomena.

³F. Stumpf and F. W. Cozens, "Hidden Possibilities for Research in Physical Education and Recreation," Research Quarterly, 18:107, 1947.

I. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The Problem:

The specific problem is to categorize the indigenous games and pastimes of the Australian aboriginal, with respect to the major aspects of his culture.

The Sub-Problem:

The secondary problem is to classify, according to their predominant characteristics, the games and pastimes of the Australian aboriginal.

II. JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The following factors serve as justification of the present study:

A. The proposed system of classifying games and pastimes will allow future researchers in this, and allied fields, greater scope in which to investigate the relationships that exist between recreation and society, in the particular culture under study.

B. The conclusion of this study may assist the researcher in his task of tracing the evolution of certain modern recreational activities by providing additional evidence, or an alternate line of approach.

C. An analysis of the place and function of play in a primitive culture may result in an increased understanding of the leisure time problems confronting the complex society of the Twentieth Century.

D. Before physical education can successfully project into the

future, the history of its achievements and failures must be understood. This study, in supplementing the works of Stumpf and Cozens,⁴ Dunlap,⁵ and Moncrieff,⁶ helps not only to broaden the scope of physical education, but to fill one gap in the vast background of this discipline.

E. Upper division courses should include ". . . the role of athletics, dance, and other physical activities in the culture, (both historic and contemporary) and in primitive as well as 'advanced' societies."⁷ The findings of this study could well be used to complement lectures in physical education, whether historically or sociologically orientated.

III. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following delimitations apply to the study:

A. With one exception, only accessible, written material housed in the libraries and museums of the North American continent will be

⁴F. Stumpf and F. W. Cozens, "Some Aspects of the Role of Games, Sports and Recreational Activities in the Culture of Modern Primitive Peoples: I. The New Zealand Maoris," Research Quarterly, 18:198-218, 1947; and F. Stumpf and F. W. Cozens, "Some Aspects of the Role of Games, Sports and Recreational Activities in the Culture of Modern Primitive Peoples: II. The Fijians," Research Quarterly, 20:2-20, 1949.

⁵H. L. Dunlap, "Games, Sports, Dancing and Other Vigorous Recreational Activities and their Function in Samoan Culture," Research Quarterly, 22:298-311, 1951.

⁶J. Moncrieff, "Physical Games and Amusements of the Australian Aboriginal," The Australian Journal of Physical Education, 36:5-11, 1966.

⁷F. M. Henry, "Physical Education - An Academic Discipline," Journal of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, 35:33, September, 1964.

utilised.

B. The study of the available articles is confined to those written in the German or English language.

C. Although dance, drama, music, songs, legends, and art were important leisure-time activities in the life of the Australian aboriginal, each is a separate study in itself. As such, they will only be discussed briefly.

D. The fact that all information pertinent to the topic has been derived from European sources makes it extremely difficult to determine the amount of external influence on the play life of these people. Attempts will be made, however, to confine the study to indigenous recreations, with two exceptions:

1. Where the origin of an activity is uncertain, the game or pastime in question will be included.

2. Where an introduced activity results in a deeper understanding of innate play, the activity will be described.

E. The major aspects of the culture will be arranged to allow future investigators, who wish to employ a similar approach to their study, to include as many cultural institutions as is deemed necessary. For the purpose of this study, however, only those institutions having related recreations will be discussed.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited by the following factors:

- A. From the explorers, missionaries and pioneers of early

Australia came the first accounts of aboriginal life. Unfortunately for the researcher in this field, these persons were primarily concerned with recording their own daily adventures. Native diversions received only brief mention, and any that were considered pagan or difficult to elucidate were by-passed, or generally interpreted from a European viewpoint. An insurmountable problem, then, exists in determining the true nature of many of these recreational activities.

B. The early writings are restrictive in the sense that they dealt only with those natives having contact with Europeans. Although most tribes have been incorporated in later studies, it is highly plausible that some elements of their play life had been abandoned or undergone modification, through direct or indirect external influences, during the years that lapsed between the arrival of the Europeans and the completion of the studies. In all probability, then, certain aspects of the existing information may be inadvertently misleading, thus presenting a somewhat distorted picture.

C. In many cases, the activities of a particular tribe have only been described by one author, who, in some instances, observed them for an extremely limited period of time. This, combined with the fact that the Australian aboriginal did not possess any written language, poses the question of the reliability of much of the information at hand.

D. The time - distance element and the availability of finances restricts the necessary correspondence and personal visitations which would be essential to fully validate a study of this nature.

V. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The following definitions apply to this study:

Economic: activities pertaining to production, consumption and exchange of goods and services within the society.

Political: activities pertaining to the theory, art and practice of government at any level of society. In this study, the treatment of political activities focuses exclusively on the elements of law and warfare.

Domestic: activities pertaining to aspects of the home and family life, within the society.

Ceremonial: activities pertaining to a fixed and/or sanctioned pattern of behaviour, which surrounds various phases of life, often serving religious or aesthetic ends.

Cultural Identification: activities pertaining to the process whereby the accumulated ideas, standards, knowledge and techniques of a society are adapted by the rising generation, and reinforced in the adult individuals.

Social Interaction: activities pertaining to the reciprocal relations of human beings.

Pastime: any free activity, active or passive, pursued for the satisfaction it affords during leisure time. Such an activity, in contrast to daily life, exhibits temporary rules and fixed boundaries of time and space. For the purpose of this study, pastimes and games are considered as separate entities.

Game: a play situation incorporating all the aspects of a

pastime, but including an element of competition and criteria for determining a winner, or winners.

Individual Pastime: any activity in which one person may indulge without lessening the enjoyment of that activity.

Group Pastime: the participation of two or more persons in the same activity, irrespective of whether or not there is overt cooperation.

Group Game: any play situation in which two or more participants compete against one member of the group, or against each other. Such a game is often characterised by more than one winner.

Team Game: any play situation in which two or more teams, each comprised of two members or more, compete to determine a winner.

Chance: activities involving the mode of occurrence of phenomena, uncontrolled by human capacity or purpose.

Dexterity: activities involving the elements of physical skill.

Enigma: activities involving mental skill outside the realm of strategy.

Exultation: activities involving jubilation and/or excitement.

Imitation: activities involving elements of mimicry.

Pursuit: activities involving the elements of chase, with a view to reaching, accomplishing or obtaining.

Strategy: activities involving the art of devising and employing plans towards a goal.

Vertigo: activities involving loss of body stability and/or equilibrium.

VI. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Prior to scrutinising the games and pastimes of the Australian aboriginal, research was undertaken in three major background areas.

The first of these involved a general study of the history, environment, activities and requirements of the aboriginal, all of which were necessary to provide an insight into his way of life.

Anthropological and sociological sources were then examined in an attempt to determine, from the more important cultural institutions, the dominant aspects of a primitive society.

In order to complete the framework into which the aboriginals' recreational activities were accommodated, the existing methods of viewing and classifying play were analysed, and the merits and shortcomings of each deliberated.

During the investigation of the preceding fields, correspondence pertaining to the play life of the aboriginal was received from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, and the Curators of Anthropology at the Australian, Queensland, South Australian and National Museums.

The references subsequently derived from these institutions establish the foundations of the study.

While a considerable amount of primary source material was inaccessible, being housed in Australia, different articles and books of this nature were available from the various North American organisations. Photostat copies of the remainder have been obtained because of the value and age of the manuscripts involved.

All the photographs reproduced in the study have been secured from The Australian Museum, Sydney, and selected reference books.

In compiling secondary source material, the University of Alberta libraries and the Interlibrary Loans Service of the University of Alberta, in particular, were utilised almost exclusively.

In order to present a comprehensive study, it was necessary to view not only the type of recreational activities in which the natives indulged, but also the relationships that existed between these activities and the major aspects of the aboriginal culture.

Previous studies of this nature exhibit marked differences in their methods of approach. Dunlap,⁸ for example, studied Samoan recreations with respect to their function and place in that society, while Roberts, Arth and Bush⁹ have concerned themselves primarily with the classification of play activities that encompass an element of competition and a victor. Moncrieff,¹⁰ in employing this classification, has confined himself to the study of games, excluding pastimes and the cultural aspects of play.

Caillouis,¹¹ on the other hand, outlined a classification that permits the inclusion of both games and pastimes, but, unlike

⁸Dunlap, loc. cit.

⁹J. M. Roberts, M. J. Arth, and R. R. Bush, "Games in Culture," American Anthropologist, 61:597-605, August, 1959.

¹⁰Moncrieff, loc. cit.

¹¹R. Caillouis, "The Structure and Classification of Games," Diogenes, No. 12, 1955, pp. 62-75.

Huizinga,¹² he does not attempt to determine the place of these activities in society.

The latter, in his book, "Homo Ludens", demonstrated the importance of play in the development of civilisation, but refrained from proposing any method of classifying it. His definition of play¹³ is indicative of his reluctance to distinguish between the game situation and other forms of play.

Others have been content to group together all play activities in question, and discuss them under a general heading such as amusements,¹⁴ or to describe them according to the principal instrument of the play, for example, ball games.¹⁵

Thus, a survey of the related literature revealed three relatively undeveloped areas in this field:

A. Outside the game situation, few attempts have been made to define or study the various types of play activities.

B. Only a preliminary effort has been made towards formulating

¹²J. Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

¹³Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁴J. Dawson, Australian Aborigines: the languages and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the Western district of Victoria, Australia (Melbourne: G. Robertson, 1881), pp. 81-86; A. C. Haddon, "The Ethnography of the Western Tribe of Torres Straits," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 19: 360-361, 1890; and W. R. Smith, Myths and Legends of the Australian Aborigines (London: George G. Harrap and Company, 1930), pp. 236-241.

¹⁵W. E. Roth, Ethnographical Studies among the North-Western Central Queensland Aborigines (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1897), pp. 128-131.

a classification that will embrace both pastimes and games.

C. The task of studying and combining both the fundamental characteristics of play and the role of the play element in a culture remains to be assayed.

In order to overcome these deficiencies, the aboriginal culture has been divided into the following major components:

- A. Economic Activities
- B. Political Activities
- C. Domestic Aspects
- D. Ceremonial Rites
- E. Cultural Identification
- F. Social Interaction

The various recreational activities of this culture have been identified in accordance with their affinity to each of the above. These six major aspects of society, along with their related play activities, have been viewed individually, and an attempt made to differentiate between the games and pastimes of each.

The predominant characteristic exhibited by each of the games and pastimes was determined, and the activity categorised according to the following classification:

- A. Chance
- B. Dexterity
- C. Enigma
- D. Exultation
- E. Imitation

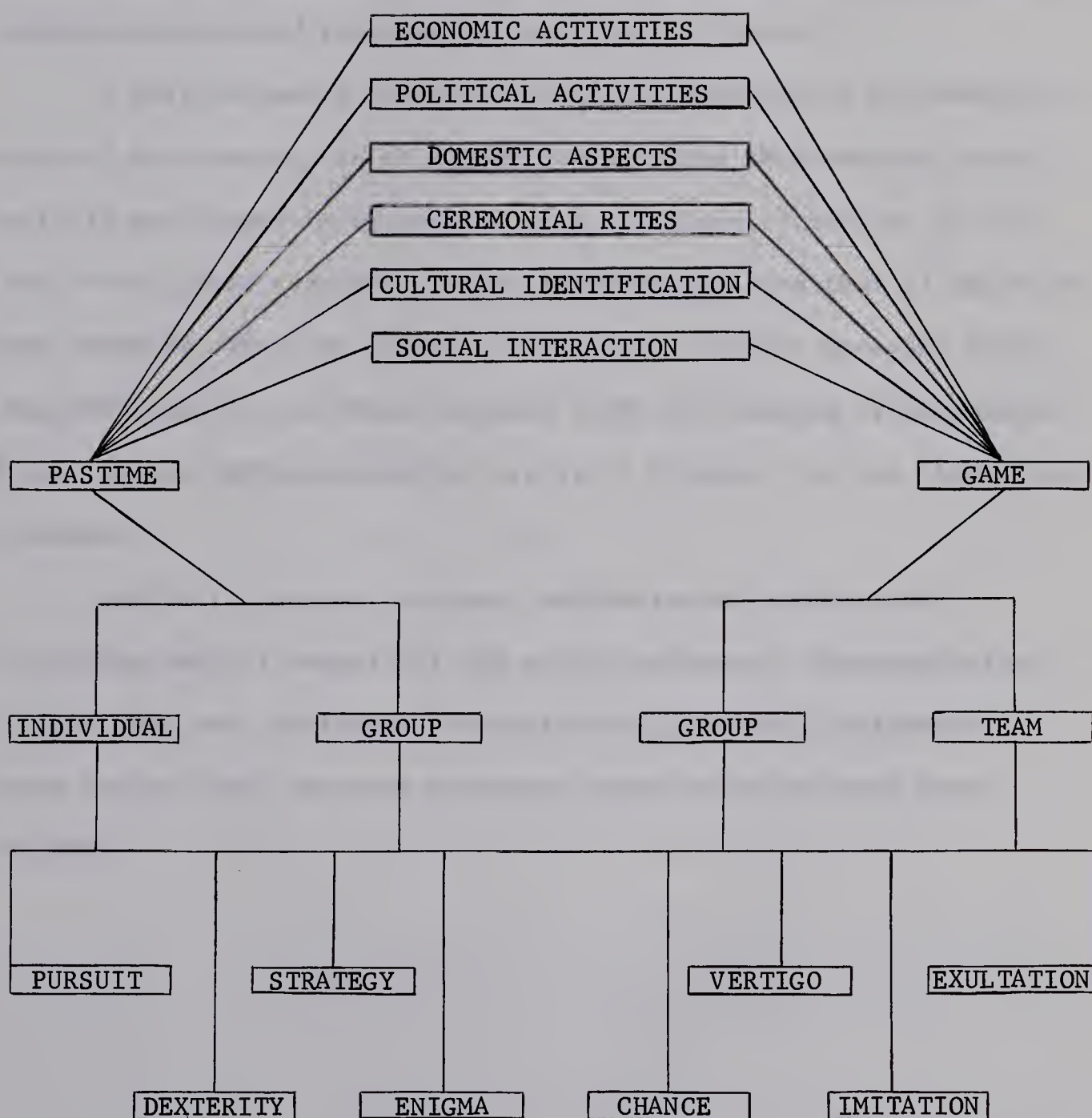


FIGURE I
STRUCTURE OF THE MODEL EMPLOYED TO CLASSIFY ABORIGINAL
GAMES AND PASTIMES

F. Pursuit

G. Strategy

H. Vertigo

The method of viewing the overall culture and classifying the associated games and pastimes is presented in Figure I.

A certain amount of overlap is to be expected in a classification of this nature. In an attempt to minimise this overlap, each activity was viewed in accordance with its place in society at the time it was first recorded, rather than the position that it may once have occupied. Thus, an activity that may previously have had religious overtones has not been included under the heading of Ceremonial Rites, unless the relationships are still evident, but was classified elsewhere.

Similarly, some of the more sophisticated recreational activities exhibit several of the eight fundamental characteristics of play that were employed to classify the games and pastimes of these people. Only the most pertinent characteristics have been recorded.

CHAPTER II

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

At the time of the Europeans' arrival in Australia, the aborigines were living a semi-nomadic life.

The existence of these Stone-Age hunters and gatherers depended, to a large extent, upon their ability to conserve the natural resources of this inhospitable land.

Moving over their tribal lands in a precise rotation, the men, with clubs, boomerangs, spears and woomeras, hunted the larger animals - kangaroos, euros, wallabies and emus - while the women gathered vegetable food and smaller animals.

Their elaborate social organisation and practice of communal living enabled them to establish a balance with nature.

Two basic types of recreational activities stem from the economic life of these people. While many of their games and pastimes were directly associated with the daily task of food collection, others had been derived from, or suggested by, their economic pursuits.

In general, however, the play activities of both groups were educative in nature, and designed to promote the development of the participants' mental and physical capacities. Pastimes involving climbing, running, jumping, throwing, tracking and stalking were encouraged, eventually to be incorporated into games revolving around the daily search for food.

I. PASTIMES DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

INDIVIDUAL PASTIMES

A. Tracking (Enigma, Imitation)

As soon as the milla milla was able to trot along behind his mother, he joined the daily hunt. He learned to track, identify, back-track and determine the type of animal, whether male or female, running or walking.¹ As they became more experienced, the youths were able to not only identify the animal, from its prints and spoor, but also its variety and the period of time since it had passed.²

Considerable effort was exercised by the adults in the reproduction of the various animal tracks, while the children were encouraged to study and imitate them, being continually praised and criticised by their elders. Not only were the tracks of various game animals reproduced, but also the footprints of individual tribal members. It was a common thing for a mother to "lose" her child while away from camp, forcing the child to follow her tracks home.³

The child learned to identify sounds - the rustle of a lizard,

¹R. B. Smyth, The Aborigines of Victoria: with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other parts of Australia and Tasmania, compiled from various sources for the government of Victoria, Vol. I (Melbourne: Government Printing Office, 1878), p. 49.

²H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), pp. 70-73.

³S. D. Porteus, The Psychology of a Primitive People: A Study of the Australian Aborigine (London: E. Arnold and Company, 1931), p. 106.

the call of a bird - and to pinpoint their position from these sounds. The mimicry of such sounds was practised in play, later to be used between members on the hunt.

Parents were required by tribal law to ensure that their offspring received constant instruction in the art of tracking.

B. Tree Climbing (Dexterity, Vertigo)

Because of their continual search for food, the natives became exceptional tree climbers. Petrie⁴ claims that instructing the youngsters in this art provided a source of amusement for all concerned. Initial instruction was given on a slanted tree, and the pupils were permitted the use of a vine to steady themselves. As their skill increased, they were encouraged to climb by cutting toe notches into the bark with a hatchet, as they ascended.⁵

Roth,⁶ who witnessed boys climbing for enjoyment, described another technique. The youths pulled out a strip of bark, freed it from below, and then pulled themselves up over it with their hands, jerking more and more of the strip away from the trunk as they advanced.

⁴C. C. Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Watson, Ferguson and Company, 1904), p. 114.

⁵J. H. Clark, Field Sports, etc., etc., of the Native Inhabitants of New South Wales (London: E. Orme, 1813), p. 13; W. A. Cawthorne, "Rough Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Natives," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch, 27:61, 1927; and J. Cotton, "The Letters of a Pioneer," Pastures New, R. V. Bills and A. S. Kenyon, editors (Melbourne: Macmillan and Company, 1930), p. 228.

⁶W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 14.

Apparently climbing for pleasure was also undertaken by the tribal women. ". . . 'Rosie', a full-blood . . . climbs just for the fun of it, although some sixty years old and hampered by a fracture of the femur suffered when she fell out of a baobab tree as a child."⁷

C. Toy Canoes (Dexterity, Exultation)

The mainland aborigines, unlike their brothers of the Torres Strait Islands, were not dependent upon the sea for survival, and as a result, their canoes were less sophisticated.⁸ Two basic types were evident on the mainland - the dug-out and the bark canoe. These were built by the inland tribes of the south-east,⁹ and most of the coastal tribes, excluding the natives of south-western Australia.

Haddon¹⁰ comments on the racing of model canoes equipped with sails, among the Torres Strait natives, but no amusement of this nature has been recorded on the mainland. Evidence, however, does exist

⁷M. S. R. S. "Rosie the Tree-Climber," Walkabout, No. 2, 15:46, February 1, 1949.

⁸N. W. Thomas, "Australian Canoes and Rafts," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 35:56-79, 1905; and H. Basedow, "Notes on the Natives of Bathurst Island, North Australia," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 48:303-305, 1913.

⁹P. Beveridge, "On the Aborigines inhabiting the Great Lacustrine and Riverine Depression of the Lower Murray, Lower Murrumbidgee, Lower Lachlan and Lower Darling," Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales, 17:40-42, 1883.

¹⁰A. C. Haddon, "The Ethnography of the Western Tribe of Torres Straits," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 19:360. 1890.



FIGURE 2 TOY BARK CANOE¹¹

of small bark canoes having been built by the mainland natives for the enjoyment of their children.¹² Toys of a similar nature have also been found among the Torres Strait aborigines.¹³ Although such toys were of a practical nature, their small owners undoubtedly received endless hours of enjoyment from them, as shown in Figure 2.

D. Pets (Exultation)

Small animals were often brought back to camp by the returning hunters, to be given to the children as pets. The animals, free to roam

¹¹D. F. Thomson, "Living Today in the Old Stone Age," Table Talk - Centenary Review, August, 1934, p. 60.

¹²D. F. Thomson, "Childhood and Play Among the Australian Aborigines," Melbourne Age, September 3, 1955.

¹³H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), p. 82.

the camp by day, were tied up at night, and while the natives bestowed an unusual amount of affection on their pets, they were reluctant to feed them. Consequently, the animals soon perished. In the Cairns district of Queensland, frogs tied by the legs, and iguanas tied by the tail, were given to the children as playthings. In a nearby area, small carpet snakes, after having their teeth rubbed down with a stick, were treated as pets. When the children tired of playing with them, they were caged in gourds, and, as no form of nourishment was provided, their fate, too, was inevitable.¹⁴

Clipped-wing pigeons, cockatoos and tame young cassowaries wandered the camps of many northern tribes, serving both recreational purposes and as camp scavengers.

The ring-tailed opossum was a favourite pet of the King Sound native women. These small marsupials often spent the entire day implanted in their owner's hair.¹⁵

While it is true that pets were made of dingo pups, this was more likely to have been out of necessity than pleasure, for although they were a favourite of the children,¹⁶ they were, when sufficiently mature, used on the hunt. These dogs, in fact, shared the natives' food

¹⁴W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:486-487, 1903.

¹⁵H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), pp. 88-90.

¹⁶Cotton, op. cit., p. 229.

and their quarters, and as pups were even suckled by the native women. While in their prime, they enjoyed the freedom of the camp, however, when they had outlived their usefulness, were slaughtered and eaten like any other animal of the bush.¹⁷

GROUP PASTIMES

A. Water Birds (Pursuit, Imitation)

This activity, common to virtually all tribes living near waterways, was played by both the men and the boys. One male, unseen by the others, hid himself somewhere along the water's edge and imitated the call of a particular water bird. The others, using their hunting skills, attempted to catch the "bird". The mimic, in trying to escape, was required to perform the physical actions of the bird that he was imitating.¹⁸

Palmer¹⁹ notes that the natives often amused themselves by diving under the water, then surfacing with their heads covered in duck-weed, in imitation of various water birds and animals.

B. Spear the Prey (Imitation, Strategy, Dexterity)

One or more boys imitated a hopping kangaroo or a strutting emu, while the other players attempted to come within spear throwing distance.

¹⁷ Beveridge, op. cit., pp. 58-60.

¹⁸ W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 14.

¹⁹ E. Palmer, "Notes on Some Australian Tribes," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 13:289, 1884.

On spying the hunters, the "animal" attempted to escape, or by clever movements of the body, to evade the weapons.²⁰ Bullrush stalks and thick reeds were commonly used as toy spears.

Duncan-Kemp records a similar pastime. "An older child about nine, already marked with tribal identification scars . . . was the hunter. The younger children assumed the movements and characteristics of their totems."²¹ They, too, attempted to escape or evade the reed spears and toy boomerangs cast at them by the hunter, while all the time imitating the animal, bird or reptile of their totem.

The Tasmanian native boys had a cruel practice of allowing a young joey to escape, then attempting to hit him with small waddies.²²

C. Iguanas (Imitation, Strategy)

This was a popular pastime amongst the native boys of Queensland's Upper Normanby district.²³ One boy, lying down, covered his forearm in sand, up to and including the elbow. He quickly poked a forefinger up through the sand and then pulled it down again, varying

²⁰W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:499, 1903; and H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), p. 81.

²¹A. M. Duncan-Kemp, Where Strange Paths Go Down (Brisbane: Smith and Paterson Limited, 1964), p. 39.

²²N. J. B. Plomley (ed.), Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829-34 (Kingsgrove, New South Wales: Halstead Press Limited, 1966), pp. 563-564.

²³W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 14.

both the timing and place of appearance. His playmates, armed with small sticks, attempted to hit the finger each time it appeared.

D. Tortoise (Imitation)

Roth²⁴ found this to be a common pastime with the aboriginal boys of Cooktown, Queensland. One boy, holding a short stick representing a woomera-spear, whistled to attract the attention of the "tortoise", played by a friend. The "tortoise", with forefingers held on either side of the head, imitative of flippers, slowly raised his head in answer to the call. The hunter pretended to throw his weapon, whereupon the reptile fell down, feigning death.

E. Hunt the Grub (Chance, Enigma)

A small sand grub was used in this children's pastime. One child covered his eyes while his playmate placed the grub in the sand, into which it quickly disappeared. The first child then attempted to locate it. If he were unable to do so, his partner assisted by pointing out the general direction in which it had disappeared. This continued until the grub was recaptured.²⁵

F. Find the Minute (Dexterity)

During cloudy weather, a popular pastime with the children was to collect the excretions of the small honey bee, from under trees within which the bee remained on such days. The search for these minute

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵L. E. Sheard, An Australian youth among desert Aborigines: journal of an expedition among the Aborigines of Australia (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1964), p. 26.

droppings, similar to a tiny grain of yellow sand, provided both an amusement and a challenge for the youngsters.²⁶

II. PASTIMES DERIVED FROM ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

INDIVIDUAL PASTIMES

A. Shooting the Petiole of a Grass Blade (Dexterity)

This was a common form of entertainment amongst the north-east coastal natives. A piece of blade grass was pulled, then split on both sides of the petiole until a convenient length of petiole was exposed, as shown in Figure 3. The cut end of the leaf was secured between the lips, while the split ends were held in the left hand. A stick, held in the right hand or a finger of the right hand, was placed under the leaf, and the split ends pulled over it, leaving the exposed petiole protruding like a miniature spear, as depicted in Figure 4. The stick was then drawn sharply forward and the petiole shot away, leaving the two halves of the leaf in the hand. The males, both young and old, were extremely adept at this pastime and capable of hitting targets of up to one hundred feet away.²⁷ Queensland's Upper Normanby natives used several different techniques of firing these missiles, as shown in Figure 5.

The coastal natives of Western Australia amused themselves with a similar type of toy, three to eight inches long. The missiles

²⁶Palmer, loc. cit.

²⁷W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 18.

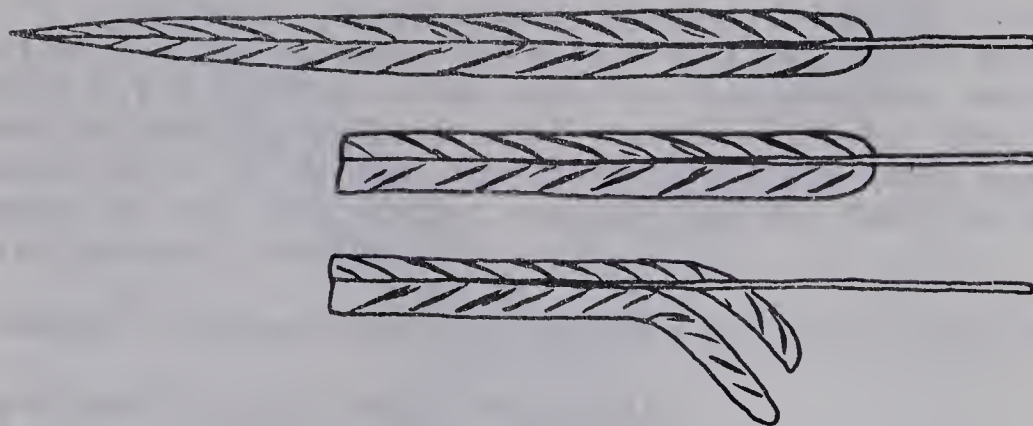


FIGURE 3 THE PREPARED PETIOLE



FIGURE 4 THE PETIOLE POSITIONED FOR FIRING

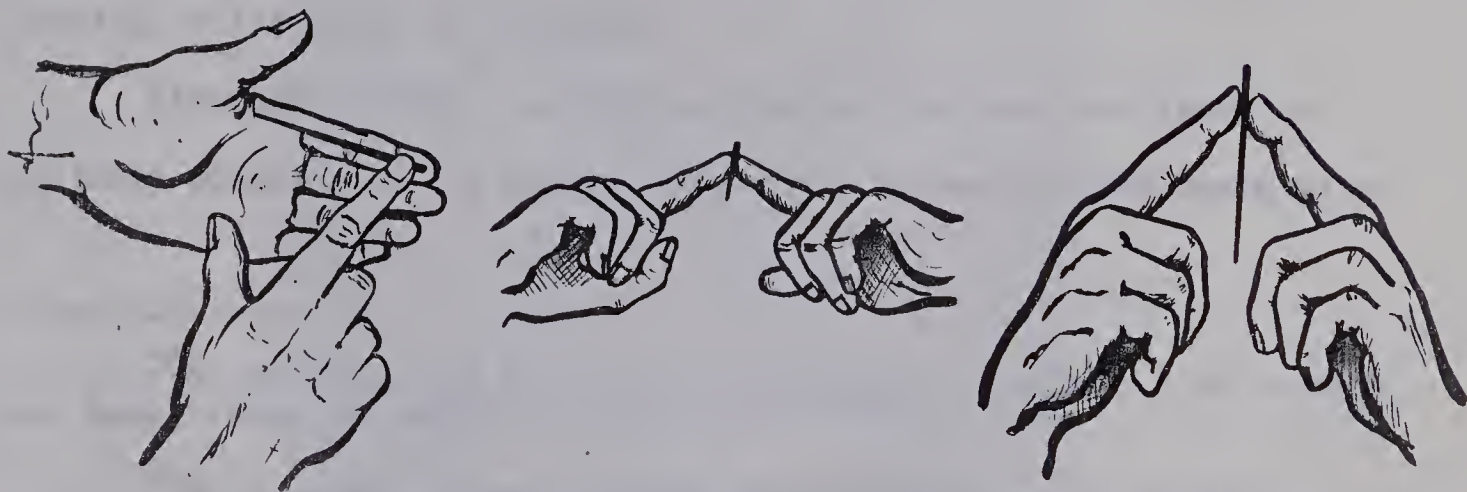


FIGURE 5 TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED BY THE ABORIGINES OF UPPER NORMANBY TO SHOOT THE PETIOLE²⁸

²⁸Ibid., Plate XXXII.

. . . are held, one at a time, between the palms of the hands parallel to, and between, the middle fingers, beyond which they project but a fraction of an inch. In this position the hands are turned so that the fingers point towards the body. Then taking careful aim at an object, the child throws its hands vigorously forward, at the same instant opening them and shooting the dart in the desired direction.²⁹

Austen³⁰ claimed that both the boys and girls were capable of piercing blow-flies with their projectiles.

B. The Cross (Dexterity)

Used only by the males, this toy was made from two flat pieces of lawyer-cane and measured up to eighteen inches in length.³¹ One or several holes, drilled near the centre of each piece, allowed them to be bound together in a crosswise position, as shown in Figure 6. If thrown directly into the air, the cross followed a circular path, twice around the thrower. If, however, it was made to hit the ground first, it completed only one loop, either to the right or left, before returning to its point of departure.

Although Kennedy³² maintains that the toy was only found in northern Queensland, its use by the natives of western New South Wales

²⁹H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), p. 82.

³⁰W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:511, 1903.

³¹Petrie, op. cit., p. 110.

³²K. Kennedy, "An Aboriginal Implement of Sport," North Queensland Naturalist, No. 90, 16:21, 1949.



FIGURE 6 THE CROSS

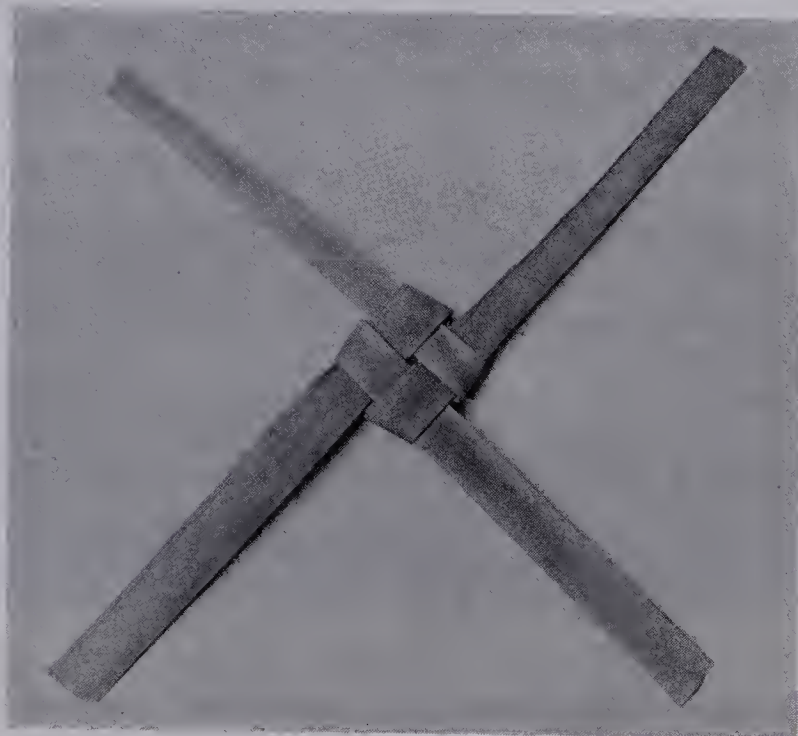


FIGURE 7 THE PANDANUS-LEAF WHIRLER

Photographs: Courtesy of The Australian Museum

has been attested to by Dunbar.³³

Of a similar nature was the pandanus-leaf whirler, depicted in Figure 7. The two pieces, either pierced and tied, or else plaited together, by the children, were thrown into the air with a twist of the wrist. Before returning, the toy completed a circle to either the left or right of the thrower.³⁴

GROUP PASTIMES

A. Honey Gathering (Imitation)

Played by two or more children, this activity was imitative of the search for honey.³⁵ One hand was placed with the fingertips on the ground, while the other hand was placed on top with the fingers resting on the hand below, as in Figure 8. The remaining players placed their hands in the same manner, on the hand below, thus forming a "tree trunk". In turn, each hand was knocked off from the one below, imitative of a tree being felled. Before the lowest hand was knocked away, the owner inserted a finger into each digital interspace searching for honey, as depicted in Figure 9. Pretending to find a snake there, she requested an imaginary hatchet from one of her palymates. The entire arm of the girl now represented the honeycomb impregnated limb of a tree. The arm

³³G. K. Dunbar, "Notes on the Ngemba Tribe of the Central Darling River, Western New South Wales," Mankind, No. 5, 3:148, December, 1943.

³⁴W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 19.

³⁵Ibid., p. 13.



FIGURE 8 HONEY GATHERING³⁶



FIGURE 9 HONEY GATHERING³⁷

³⁶Ibid., Plate XVI.

³⁷Ibid., Plate XVII.



FIGURE 10 HONEY GATHERING³⁸



FIGURE 11 HONEY GATHERING³⁹

³⁸Ibid., Plate XVIII.

³⁹Ibid., Plate XIX.



FIGURE 12 HONEY GATHERING⁴⁰



FIGURE 13 HONEY GATHERING⁴¹

⁴⁰Ibid., Plate XX.

⁴¹Ibid., Plate XXI.

was held at the wrist by one of her playmates, while a chopping action was made at the elbow to cut off the limb, as shown in Figure 10. The elbow was then encircled with the fingers and rubbed once upwards and once downwards, (Figure 11) to indicate that the upper portion of the tree, where the comb lay, was taboo to the women, whereas the lower portion of dirt and drippings was free. The same action was then carried out on each girl's arm. The honey was next collected from the removed limbs and mixed with water in a bark vessel, represented by all the cupped hands resting one upon the other, as in Figures 12 and 13. When the desired strength and consistency had been obtained, each child pretended to eat the mixture.

This activity was never played by the men and rarely by the women, indicating that the collection of honey was a task for the younger females and uninitiated boys.

B. Bean Tree (Imitation)

This pastime was played by the children of both sexes, along the Tully River of Queensland.⁴² Sitting in circle formation, the children built a vertical column of fists on the knee of one of the participants. Each hand was previously twisted out of shape by bending one finger over and behind the other. When the fists were in position, the thumb above was placed on the little finger of the lower hand, as shown in Figure 14. This column represented a bean tree, and each hand, a bean. The leader removed the top fist by pinching up the skin on its dorsum,

⁴²Ibid., p. 14.



FIGURE 14 BEAN TREE⁴³



FIGURE 15 BEAN TREE⁴⁴

⁴³Ibid., Plate XXV.

⁴⁴Ibid., Plate XXVI.

and, at the same time, poking her finger up into its palm, as depicted in Figure 15. The hand fell off, palm up and fingers free, to lie at its owner's side. After the remaining beans had been picked in the same way, the leader pretended to collect them up, and then ran into the surrounding scrub and hid them. The other players, after searching unsuccessfully, were told by the leader that a flood had come and washed them away.

C. Catching Cockatoos (Imitation)

This pastime from the Cooktown, Cape Bedford and McIvor River areas of Queensland,⁴⁵ was also played by children of both sexes, sitting



FIGURE 16 CATCHING COCKATOOS⁴⁶

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁶Ibid., Plate XXII.



FIGURE 17 CATCHING COCKATOOS⁴⁷



FIGURE 18 CATCHING COCKATOOS⁴⁸

⁴⁷Ibid., Plate XXIII.

⁴⁸Ibid., Plate XXIV.

in circle formation. As illustrated in Figure 16, a column of clenched fists was built, with the forefinger of each hand protruding. This finger was gripped by the thumb and lower three fingers of the hand below it, as is shown in Figure 17. This column represented a flock of cockatoos, sitting one above the other, on a branch of a tree. The one free hand in the group attempted to catch the exposed topmost forefinger, or "cockatoo", between the fore and middle fingers (Figure 18), the fork representative of a pronged spear. The "cockatoo" was put to the mouth of its captor, a click given - the sign of its being eaten, and then handed on to the other players. The remaining "birds" were speared and disposed of in the same manner.

III. GAMES DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

GROUP GAMES

A. Hunting and Guessing (Enigma)

A Northern Territory native, on returning from the hunt, would hide his catch in the nearby bush, and then ask if anyone could name the animal, bird or reptile that he had killed. All were permitted to guess, and the native who guessed correctly was pointed to by the hunter. All the other participants then pointed to the winner and he or she was permitted a choice piece of the kill as the prize.⁴⁹

⁴⁹W. E. Harney, "Sport and Play amidst the Aborigines of the Northern Territory," Mankind, No. 9, 4:377, November, 1952.

B. Climbing Competition (Dexterity, Vertigo)

The aboriginal men of the Victoria River district arranged tree climbing competitions for the more skillful youngsters.⁵⁰ The competitors were required to scale and descend a number of selected trees, the fastest one being declared the winner.

C. Coursing (Pursuit)

For this game, a small animal - dingo, wallaby or rat, was captured alive in a net and held in captivity by means of a strong twine attached to one of its legs. When the players were in position, the animal was released. It had to be taken alive, with the hands only, the use of any form of weapon not being permitted.⁵¹

Needless to say, this game was not played in Central Australia where it was extremely difficult to obtain sufficient food for bodily needs, let alone as a means of recreation.

D. Crocodile (Dexterity, Imitation)

The native boys of Queensland's Upper Normanby district played a game called crocodile, whereby one youngster, floating on the surface of the water, attempted to imitate this reptile.⁵² If the "crocodile" chanced to be hit by one of the miniature spears thrown at him, he

⁵⁰H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), pp. 75-76.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 88; and W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:487, 1903.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 499-500.

slowly exhaled and began to sink. If his playmates failed to secure him before he disappeared below the water's surface, the "crocodile" was considered to have escaped.

E. The Iguana-Claw (Chance, Enigma)

This game was played by the Kokominni tribe of Queensland.⁵³
The players sat in a circle, with their heads bowed and their hands over their eyes. An iguana-claw was hidden in the fork of a nearby tree by one of the participants. On a given signal, the remaining players began their search. The boy finding the claw had the privilege of hiding it at the commencement of the next game. Variations of this game were played in other areas, whereby objects other than the iguana-claw were hidden.⁵⁴

F. Spear the Disc (Dexterity, Imitation)

The game of spear the disc, and its variations, was common to most Australian tribes.⁵⁵

A thick bark disc was rolled by a native across a cleared space or down a slope, towards, but in front of, the other participants.

⁵³Ibid., p. 507.

⁵⁴H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), p. 78.

⁵⁵Porteus, op. cit., p. 168; Harney, loc. cit.; J. Dawson, Australian Aborigines: the language and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the Western district of Victoria, Australia (Melbourne: G. Robinson, 1881), p. 85; W. Bland, Journal of Discovery to Port Phillip, New South Wales: by Messrs. W. H. Hovell and H. Hume in 1824 and 1826 (Sydney: A. Hill, 1965), p. 77; and Palmer, loc. cit.

The latter, standing in line, were armed with short spears, four to five feet long. As the disc passed their line of vision, they endeavoured to pierce it with their missiles, as shown in Figure 19. Beveridge stated that:

By the time the disc had ceased rolling, it presents the appearance of a gigantic shuttlecock, the spears sticking therein representing the feathers, and the bark the cork basis. When one makes a bull's-eye . . . he is greeted with loud applause, and it is most farcical to see how modest he endeavours to appear under the laudation, striving to make it appear but a common occurrence⁵⁶

The bark, freshly cut to prevent it from splintering upon the impact of the spears, ranged from one to three feet in diameter.⁵⁷

The technique of delivering the disc varied considerably. While most tribes used a smooth underhand delivery to ensure a long roll, some of the New South Wales tribes threw the disc with both hands, from an overhead position.⁵⁸ Smyth, writing on the Victorian natives, notes that they threw it ". . . downward from the shoulder, and with a peculiar jerk - so as to give the disc a ricochet-like movement as it bounded rather than rolled along the grass."⁵⁹

The tribes on the Bloomfield in Queensland used a wooden ball,

⁵⁶Beveridge, op. cit., p. 54.

⁵⁷E. Hassell, "Notes on the ethnology of the Wheelman tribe of Southwestern Australia," Anthropos, D. S. Davidson, editor. 31:687, 1936.

⁵⁸Beveridge, loc. cit.

⁵⁹Smyth, op. cit., p. 50.



FIGURE 19 SPEARING THE DISC⁶⁰

cut from the cycas tree, rather than a disc.⁶¹ One native, using a spear to start the ball and help it gain momentum, would send it rolling down a cleared slope, fifteen to twenty yards long. His friends, lining the cleared pathway, attempted to hit the ball with their spears as it sped past. Here again, small spears, especially manufactured to be thrown by hand, were used. In some localities, the ball, in the same way as the disc, was thrown with an underhand action.⁶²

The game of Murri Murri was played mainly by the boys, although occasionally the men joined in. The players formed two lines, some

⁶⁰W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, Plate XXXI.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 508-509.

⁶²K. Birket-Smith, Primitive Man and his Ways (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1960), p. 16.

sixteen to eighteen yards apart. The disc was rolled between the two lines, and as it passed, the players threw their spears at it. Individual skill was all important, as apparently no attempt was made to determine the number of strikes per team. In this area, "Murri" was the native name for kangaroo, so, in reality, the players were throwing at a symbolic kangaroo.⁶³

Parker⁶⁴ reports on the game of Wungoolay, as played by the Euahlayi tribe. Here, the main body of participants, armed with small spears, stood in the centre of a clearing. Two men, each carrying several bark discs, separated and stationed themselves about fifty yards apart, in front of the main group. In turn, they hurled their discs across the clearing in front of the armed men. Once again, as the objects rolled past, the natives attempted to spear them, the player recording the most hits winning the game.

Still another variation of the game was recorded in the Humbert River district of the Northern Territory.⁶⁵ Two groups of men stationed themselves about twenty-two yards apart, opposite each other. A bark disc was thrown overarm by a member of one party, so that it rolled in front of, and past the other group. After having cast their spears, and recorded their hits, one member of the group returned the disc in

⁶³Petrie, op. cit., p. 109.

⁶⁴K. L. Parker, The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia (London: A. Constable and Company, 1905), p. 128.

⁶⁵H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), pp. 76-77.

the same fashion to the first group, while the rest of his team collected the spears in readiness for the next turn. Thus, the players were alternately active and passive. In this area, both the men and boys played the game together.

A more modern variation of the game was recorded along the Finke River.⁶⁶ Here, the bark disc was replaced by an iron ring, with the object being to throw the spears through it.

The Arunndta and Dieri children released dry tussocks of grass on a flat clay pan. As the wind rolled the tussocks along, the youngsters endeavoured to pierce them with toy spears, or shatter them with toy boomerangs.⁶⁷

In the Fowler's Bay area, a ball of fur-string was rolled across a clearing by an elder. The youths attempted to spear it with their miniature spears.⁶⁸

The natives of Tasmania sent a piece of kelp, about a foot in diameter, rolling across a clearing. The players endeavoured to spear it as it rolled along. Plomley⁶⁹ reported that the participants associated the rolling kelp with a fleeing kangaroo.

Smith⁷⁰ viewed an interesting variation of the game in which

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 76.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Plomley, op. cit., p. 292.

⁷⁰W. R. Smith, Myths and Legends of the Australian Aborigines (London: George G. Harrap and Company, 1930), pp. 239-240.

a group of boys stood in a line, some seventy to eighty yards long. Two boys stationed themselves at each end of the line, but at a distance of about forty yards in front of it. They rolled an implement made of two crossed sticks, most probably a toy cross, back and forth, while their companions attempted to stop the motion of the sticks with their toy boomerangs and spears. As the sticks represented a bounding wall-aby, the game played an important role in developing the skill of these future hunters.

IV. GAMES DERIVED FROM ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

GROUP GAMES

A. Pit Throwing (Dexterity)

This game was played by the Kalkadoon tribe of Queensland.⁷¹ A short, heavy stick or a large bone, often a human shin, attached to a piece of twine, was cast over an emu-net into a pit or hole, excavated on the far side. The distance between the pit and the thrower was often considerable, and a great amount of skill was obviously required in order to land the bone in the hole without it touching the net.

B. Ducks and Drakes (Dexterity)

Played by the children on any calm expanse of water, this game was identical to that played by European youngsters. Selecting a handful of relatively flat pebbles from the dry land, the children arranged

⁷¹W. E. Roth, Ethnographical Studies Among the North-Western Central Queensland Aborigines (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1897), p. 131.

themselves in a row along the water's edge. In turn, they threw their stones at the water's surface, attempting to achieve the greatest number of ricochets, and thus, the maximum distance, before their pebble sank.⁷²

C. Hide and Seek (Strategy, Pursuit)

The game of hide and seek was common to most tribes, being played by both the children and adults.⁷³ The seekers, often as many as three, covered their eyes with their hands, or with their eyes tightly closed, put their heads to the ground, while the others concealed themselves. The players endeavoured to mislead the seeker by obliterating their tracks and substituting false, deceptive ones.

The Victorian natives, once hidden, gave a signal, by whistling. The seeker then had to determine their location from the direction of the sound.⁷⁴

A discovered player, unless he had time to escape, was pummelled by the seeker.⁷⁵

In some Queensland tribes, the seeker, if he were unable to

⁷²Parker, loc. cit.; and H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), pp. 74-75.

⁷³Parker, op. cit., p. 129; and Harney, loc. cit.

⁷⁴Smyth, op. cit., p. 179; and T. Worsnop, The Prehistoric Arts, Manufactures, Works, Weapons, etc., of the Aborigines of Australia (Adelaide: Government Printing Office, 1897), p. 165.

⁷⁵H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), pp. 78-79.

locate those hidden, signalled defeat by whistling.⁷⁶

The native version of hide and seek differed from the European version in that no attempt was made to reach "home" before being caught.

D. Duck (Imitation)

The game of duck, played by the native children of Cooktown, Cape Bedford and the McIvor River districts of Queensland, bore a marked resemblance to the European game of Oranges and Lemons.⁷⁷ A long stick, with one end touching the ground, was held at an angle by one of the players. This represented a man catching a duck by means of a slip noose attached to a long, slender stick. The children ran under the stick, one at a time, until the stick descended in front of one of them. This child was considered to be dead, and required to lie off to one side, eyes closed. The game continued until all the players were "dead" in a row. The catcher then prodded each "victim" in turn, with a stick, enquiring as to the location of their home, and then ordered them off, whereupon the players ran away, ostensibly for home.

E. Hunt the Eye (Chance, Dexterity)

This popular game, played by the natives of all ages and either

⁷⁶W. E. Roth, Ethnographical Studies Among the North-Western Central Queensland Aborigines (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1897), p. 130.

⁷⁷W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 14.

sex, was so called because the object most commonly hidden was the lens of a cat-fish's, rat's, opossum's or small kangaroo's eye, removed after cooking. Occasionally, other minute objects, such as grass seeds, were used. The players squatted around a small area of carefully smoothed sandy ground several feet in diameter. On a given signal, all the participants closed their eyes, with the exception of one, whose task was to hide the object beneath the sand. The others then searched for the object by pinching up the sand, and allowing it to trickle slowly through their fingers. An alternate method was for the person hiding the object to take up handful upon handful of sand and sprinkle it back over the area, waiting for an opportune moment to drop the lens. This was done in full view of the other participants.⁷⁸

In some areas, one native quickly passed the lens from hand to hand, seeking his opportunity to drop it, unseen, onto the sand. The player finding the lens was declared the winner and permitted to start the new game.⁷⁹

F. Hunt the Object (Enigma)

This Northern Territory game, as described by Harney,⁸⁰ was similar in nature to the game of Hunt the Eye, and was probably a local variation of it. The players covered their faces, or walked away from a

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 130.

⁷⁹Palmer, loc. cit.

⁸⁰Harney, loc. cit.

smooth, flat, sandy area, about two feet in diameter, while one of their members hid a small object about the size of a match head, in the sand. He then blew carefully to remove any disturbances in the sand, but left a portion of the object showing. The other players, each holding a piece of strong grass, were given two attempts to point it out, but in doing so could not scratch the surface of the sand. The person who found the object had the right to hide it again. If the object was not found, the native who had done the hiding was challenged to find it. He was required, however, to first walk twice around the area before attempting to point out its position. Failure to locate it caused him to forfeit his position and another leader was chosen by mutual consent.

G. The Returning Boomerang (Dexterity)

The boomerang was probably the most famous of the Australian aboriginal weapons. It was an advanced form of the throwing club, but contrary to popular belief, was not common to all tribes.

Researchers⁸¹ have noted that several peoples of antiquity, including the Egyptians and Assyrians, used a form of boomerang, however Smyth states that "there is nothing to show that anything like the . . . (play boomerang) was known to any other people anywhere at any time"82

A popular fallacy that has arisen is that if the boomerang did

⁸¹C. Lumholtz, Among Cannibals: an account of four years' travels in Australia and camp life with the Aborigines of Queensland (London: John Murray, 1889), pp. 51-52.

⁸²Smyth, op. cit., p. xiviii.



FIGURE 20 RETURNING BOOMERANG, QUEENSLAND

not hit its target, it returned to the thrower. While it was true that in skilled hands the hunting or fighting boomerang could be thrown to describe an arc in the air, it could not be made to land at the thrower's feet, as could the returning boomerang - a plaything of the east and west coast tribes,⁸³ depicted in Figure 20.

In comparison with the fighting weapon, the returning boomerang was much lighter, weighing between four and twelve ounces, and was considerably smaller. Its outstanding features were a deep curve in relation to its length, extremities that were slightly twisted in opposite directions, a flat undersurface and a convex upper surface.⁸⁴

It was made as the occasion required, sometimes being cut down

⁸³Dunbar, loc. cit.; and Palmer, op. cit., p. 287.

⁸⁴Smyth, op. cit., pp. 311-313; and Dawson, loc. cit.

Photograph: Courtesy of The Australian Museum.

from a broken or damaged fighting boomerang, or more commonly, being shaped from the bark of a gum tree. The more valuable implement was made of hardwood, iron-bark or she-oak, and was decorated or, more often, simply smeared with charcoal.

The returning boomerang was regarded by the natives as a classic instrument, as was the discus by the Ancient Greeks. The ability to merely throw the weapon was insufficient. The style of throwing was all important, and considerable practice was devoted to gaining the power, height and length required by the weapon to perform its intricate manoeuvres.

Held in one hand, the boomerang was placed behind the thrower's head, with the concave edge forward. As the thrower ran forward, he brought his arm over swiftly and released the weapon with a powerful wrist movement. When thrown upward into the air, it spun vertically for about thirty feet before assuming a horizontal path.⁸⁵ Once in flight, it made three or four complete circles, each reversed in direction, smaller, and at a lower level than the one immediately preceding it.

When thrown at the ground, it bounced upwards with considerable speed, performing manoeuvres similar to those described above.⁸⁶

The flight of a returning boomerang, thrown by a Queensland

⁸⁵Smyth, loc. cit.

⁸⁶Hassell, loc. cit.; J. Browne, "The Aborigines of Australia," Canadian Journal of Industry, Science and Art, No. 3, 1856, p. 270; and G. Parsons, Black Chattels: the Story of the Australian Aborigines (London: The National Council for Civil Liberties, 1946), p. 9.

native, was described by the Norwegian explorer, Carl Lumholtz:

As it leaves the hand, it turns on its side and rotates round a vertical axis, humming like a spinning wheel. As it moves rapidly forward this rotatory movement causes it to climb obliquely into the air. It returns, not by the way it went, but in a left-hand curve, thus describing one ellipse. As it slowly loses momentum, it gradually falls to the ground no more than a couple of steps from its point of departure The natives often make it hit the ground ten to twelve steps from the point where it was thrown, but far from reducing the speed, this increases the velocity. After hitting the ground the first time, the implement can even repeat it and fly on again, describing a circle from right to left.⁸⁷

The natives derived considerable enjoyment from simply throwing the returning boomerang,⁸⁸ and several games developed around this remarkable toy.

The game of Bubberah, as described by Parker,⁸⁹ was basically a test of the thrower's skill. The boomerang was sent gyrating on a circular path, returning to land as close as possible to a predetermined spot, which may have been in front, behind or to the side of the thrower. Prior to the contest, the boomerang was rubbed over with charred grass and fat, and then warmed over a small fire. This apparently, in some way, affected its flight.

Inter-tribal competitions, according to Smith,⁹⁰ were organised in some areas. The competitors attempted to complete two or three loops

⁸⁷Birket-Smith, op. cit., p. 41.

⁸⁸M. C. Mathews, "On the manners, customs, religion, superstitions, etc., of the Australian native," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 24:189, 1895.

⁸⁹Parker, op. cit., pp. 127-128.

⁹⁰Smith, op. cit., pp. 240-241.

with their boomerangs, and land them inside a circle several feet from where they stood.

The natives of the Mitakoodi tribe of Queensland drove a peg into the ground, the objective being to strike the peg with the boomerang on its final run. If no strikes were made, the player whose boomerang fell closest to the peg was declared the winner.⁹¹

Probably the most skillful game of this nature was played by the Tully River natives of Queensland.⁹² The competitor armed himself with a long hunting spear and a come-back boomerang. The latter was sent on its gyrating path in such a manner that on its final run it would hit the vertically held spear. From here, it was made to pass spiralling down the spear, into the thrower's hand.

TEAM GAME

Rolling the Boomerang (Pursuit, Strategy)

The boomerang was used in a team game played by the Djinghali natives of the Northern Territory.⁹³ In this tribe, it was customary for the young men to play against a team of old men. The boomerang was thrown, rolling along the ground, from one team member to another,

⁹¹W. E. Roth, Ethnographical Studies Among the North-Western Central Queensland Aborigines (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1897), p. 128.

⁹²W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:512, 1903.

⁹³Harney, op. cit., p. 378.

while the opposition attempted to intercept it. It was common for a player to outdistance his opponents while carrying the boomerang, before endeavouring to roll it on to a team member. The game terminated when one team became too exhausted to continue. Surprisingly enough, the older men, with their superior knowledge of the game, usually won. In order to ensure victory, the old men often saved their best runner until the youths were exhausted, and then rolled the boomerang to him. Once he received it, he was generally able to keep going until the other side admitted defeat.

A summary of this chapter reveals that many of the games and pastimes outlined closely resembled actual hunting situations, with the place of the hunted being assumed by an object or player. Although all the weapons and skills used on the hunt were employed during these activities, throwing implements, such as the spear and boomerang, were the most commonly used.

It is noticeable that the semi-passive games and pastimes were dominated by the females, while those of a more vigorous nature were played by the males. This situation is a reflection of their normal hunting practices, the women gathering and collecting, and the men pursuing the larger game.

A breakdown of pastimes and games of an economic nature, and the associated characteristics of each are presented in Table I. The following abbreviations are used:

C	Chance	I	Imitation
D	Dexterity	P	Pursuit
E	Enigma	S	Strategy
e	Exultation	V	Vertigo

TABLE I
THE CHARACTERISTICS AND FREQUENCY OF GAMES AND PASTIMES
ASSOCIATED WITH ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

	C	D	E	e	I	P	S	V
INDIVIDUAL PASTIMES								
Tracking			x		x			
Tree climbing		x						x
Toy canoes		x		x				
Pets				x				
Shooting the petiole of a grass blade		x						
The cross		x						
GROUP PASTIMES								
Water birds					x	x		
Spear the prey		x			x		x	
Iguanas					x		x	
Tortoise					x			
Hunt the grub	x		x					
Find the minute		x						
Honey gathering					x			
Bean tree					x			
Catching cockatoos					x			
GROUP GAMES								
Hunting and guessing			x					
Climbing competition		x						x
Coursing						x		
Crocodile		x			x			
The iguana-claw	x		x					
Spear the disc		x			x			
Pit throwing		x						
Ducks and drakes		x						
Hide and seek						x	x	
Duck					x			
Hunt the eye	x	x						
Hunt the object			x					
The returning boomerang		x						
TEAM GAME								
Rolling the boomerang						x	x	

TABLE I (continued)

Total Play Activities of an Economic Nature

Pastimes

Individual - 6

Group - 9

Games

Group - 13

Team - 1

Frequency of Predominant Play Characteristics

Dexterity - 13

Imitation - 11

Enigma - 5

Pursuit - 4

Strategy - 4

Chance - 3

Exultation - 2

Vertigo - 2

CHAPTER III

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Generally speaking, the games and pastimes associated with political activities revolved around the two aspects of war and tribal justice. As the outcomes of both depended, to a large extent, upon the individual's skill with weapons, many of the aboriginals' play activities were designed to reinforce the skills of the warriors and prepare the youths for such an occasion.

Difficulty was sometimes encountered in distinguishing between the amusements associated with the economic and the political aspects of life, where play involved the use of weapons. According to Duncan-Kemp, "there is a difference in hunting spear and boomerang methods and the art of warding off or giving thrusts to an enemy."¹ The fathers ensured that their sons realised the difference early in life, and reinforced their teaching by incorporating the respective skills into play activities. The warriors, too, employed the medium of play to maintain and upgrade their fighting skills.

While undoubtedly there was a considerable overlap between some play activities of an economic nature and the activities outlined in this chapter, those of a political nature place greater emphasis on courage, protection, agility and accuracy, which are all vital for

¹A. M. Duncan-Kemp, Where Strange Paths Go Down (Brisbane: Smith and Paterson Limited, 1964), p. 210.

survival in a threatening situation.

Again, two types of play activities have emerged. The first was directly associated with fighting ability, while the second has evolved from their battle training sessions and implements of defence.

I. PASTIMES DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

GROUP PASTIMES

A. Sham Fights (Dexterity, Imitation)

The small boys delighted in imitating the arts of war as practised by their elders. Miniature weapons were manufactured by the tribal elders for the youths, specifically for their war games.² Toy spears, made from light, thin withes, grass, reeds or rushes, were thrown by hand (Figure 21), or with the use of a toy woomera. Those thrown by hand were held at their lighter ends, with the forefinger hooked over the extreme end.

Several types of toy woomeras were constructed.³ The flattened piece of wood, with a projection at one extremity, a miniature of the adult version, was found among the Wellesley Islanders and the natives west of Burketown, Queensland (Figure 22). The more common toy variety

²F. D. McCarthy, "Aborigines: Games and Pastimes," The Australian Encyclopaedia (Sydney: Halstead Press, 1958), I, 37; and D. F. Thomson, "Childhood and Play among the Australian Aborigines," Melbourne Age, September 3, 1955.

³W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:501, 1903.



FIGURE 21 TOY SPEAR
THROWN BY HAND

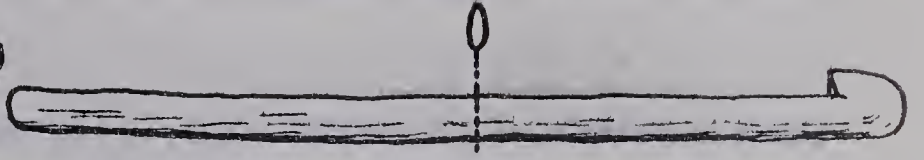


FIGURE 22
MINIATURE WOOMERA

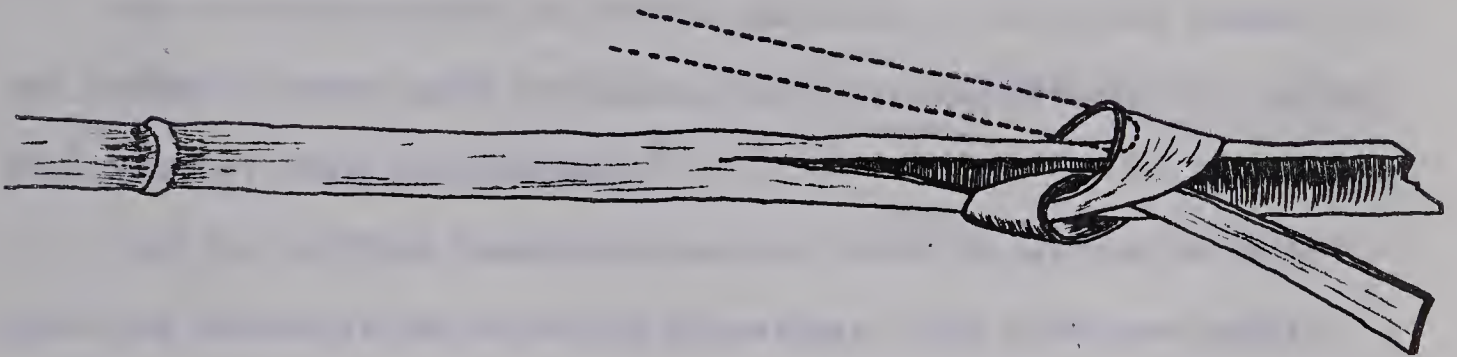


FIGURE 23 TOY RUSH WOOMERA

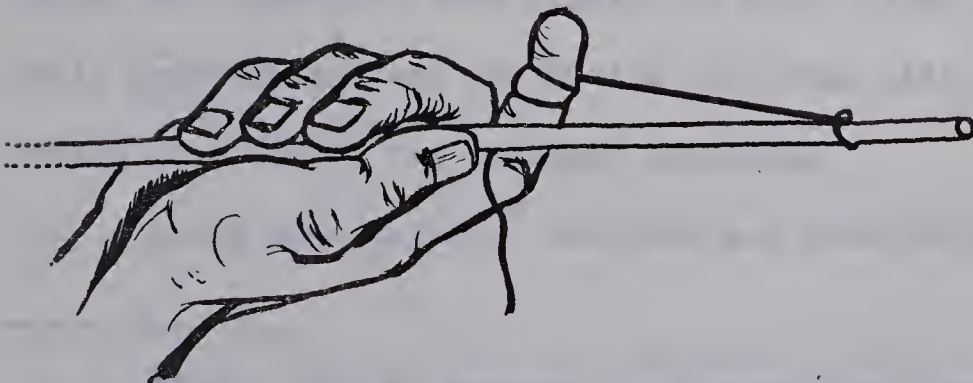


FIGURE 24
STRING "WOOMERA", NORTHERN TERRITORY⁴



FIGURE 25

⁴Ibid., Plate XXVIII.

was made by splitting the ends of a rush and looping one end around the other, to form a socket into which the reed spear fitted, as shown in Figure 23.

The aboriginal boys of the Northern Territory constructed a toy spear with a "built-in" woomera. A piece of twine was knotted around the end of a spear, and the free end of the twine wound several times around the forefinger, as shown in Figures 24 and 25. Pressure applied to the twine, as the spear was thrown, gave it greater impetus.

In districts where the shield was used, it was quite common for the youths to carry small imitations, and use them effectively, during the course of their mock battles.⁵

As the toy bark boomerangs were not able to perform the same intricate stunts as the returning boomerangs, they were used mainly in games of a combative nature.

Basedow⁶ states that when the youths of Western Australia's Northern Kimberleys had become skilled in throwing war-weapons, the tribal men organised sham fights for them. Sides were selected under adult supervision, and the battle contested with pieces of bark shaped to resemble the straight boomerang.

Among some tribes,⁷ one side was armed with bark boomerangs and

⁵Ibid.; and H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), pp. 86-87.

⁶Ibid.

⁷K. L. Parker, The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia (London: A. Constable and Company, 1905), p. 69.

the other equipped with bark shields, the former playing an attacking role, and the latter, a defensive one. A variation of this pastime occurred in the same area, where a lone warrior, armed with a bark shield, was forced to defend himself against a group of fellow players equipped with toy bark boomerangs.⁸

The native boys often engaged in a pastime whereby one youth threw his bark boomerang at a friend, standing several yards away. According to the rules, the latter was not permitted to move until the weapon had been cast.

Slightly more dangerous in nature were the sham fights of the Yaro-inga tribe of central Queensland.⁹ The men, divided into two groups, attempted to strike each other with their hardwood, returning boomerangs. The fact that the returning boomerang, and not the fighting version, was employed, made this pastime considerably more enjoyable.

Bark boomerangs were by no means the only weapons used in mock battles, both clubs and spears being popular.¹⁰

⁸Ibid., pp. 128-129.

⁹W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 19.

¹⁰R. B. Smyth, The Aborigines of Victoria: with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other parts of Australia and Tasmania, compiled from various sources for the government of Victoria, Vol. I (Melbourne: Government Printing Office, 1878), p. 180; T. Worsnop, The Prehistoric Arts, Manufactures, Works, Weapons, etc., of the Aborigines of Australia (Adelaide: Government Printing Office, 1897), p. 167; and W. L. Warner, A Black Civilisation: a social study of an Australian tribe (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 489.

Petrie¹¹ recalls a sham fight amongst some Queensland natives, where spears fashioned from small oak saplings, about five feet in length, were used as weapons. Toy bark shields, approximately eighteen inches long and eight inches wide, were employed to ward off the missiles. If injuries occurred, they were slight, for, prior to the contest, the tips of the spears were chewed until they were soft and spongy.

Plomley writes of the daring and skill of the Tasmanian natives who indulged in this pastime, and records them as ". . . frequently catching the spears of their adversary with their hands."¹²

It was quite common for several boys to side against a single player, and attempt to hit him with their toy spears. In most instances, the latter threw his own spears in return,¹³ however, on Millingimbi Island, off Northern Australia,¹⁴ the lone defender attempted to bat away the spears of his attackers with his own weapon.

In the same region, two groups of boys threw toy spears (with their ends wrapped in paper bark) at each other. Several girls stood between the two groups and endeavoured to bat the flying spears away

¹¹C. C. Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Watson, Ferguson and Company, 1904), pp. 113-114.

¹²N. J. B. Plomley, (ed.), Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829-34 (Kingsgrove, New South Wales: Halstead Press Limited, 1966), p. 92.

¹³J. C. Goodale, "Sketches of Tiwi Children," Expedition, No. 4, 2:7, 1960.

¹⁴A. Poignant, Piccaninny walkabout: a story of two Aboriginal children (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1957), p. xi.

from their intended targets with sticks. If a boy chanced to be hit, his "killer" ran away, while the girls wept over the victim and hit their foreheads with stones, in sorrow.

B. Inter-tribal Tournaments (Dexterity, Strategy)

Inter-tribal tournaments were held regularly in many areas. Among the Mallanpara aborigines of central Queensland, a meeting of this nature was called a Prun.¹⁵ Although essentially a form of entertainment, they often served to settle personal scores and tribal disagreements, and, on occasions, to administer justice. The tournament, conducted on an area specifically reserved for the purpose, was held every seventh or thirteenth day by the Tully River natives. The participating tribes, having been previously invited by a messenger, established temporary quarters around the perimeter of the "arena".

A number of men were chosen to represent each tribe. Elaborately decorated, and accompanied by several women carrying their weapons, they made a boisterous entrance into the circle, before taking their places around the edge. The remaining participants entered the circle in the same way, and then settled down to rest until mid-afternoon, when, by tradition, the tournament commenced.

The tribe on whose territory the event was being staged had the privilege of starting the proceedings in one of the following ways:

¹⁵W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:501-506, 1903.

1. One or several men of the home tribe would cast a spear or boomerang into the tribe with which they wished to do battle.

2. One would throw insults at a member of a visiting tribe, tempting him to the centre.

3. The home tribe would taunt and hold the whole gathering up to ridicule and contempt.

4. If there were no real cause for quarrel, either singularly or collectively, a reason would be invented.¹⁶

If a personal feud existed, and the gathering was in agreement, this encounter was held first. In some areas, the loser of such a contest was required to blow on the cheek of the victor, while in other tribes, the combatants clashed the flat fronts of their shields together at the conclusion of the match. Both gestures signified forgiveness and friendship.

At the completion of such matches, the "real battles" between the representatives of the various tribes commenced.

Two very strict rules governed these encounters. First, absolutely no fighting was permitted beyond the designated area, and second, spears could only be thrown at the knees or feet. The latter rule was waived if an individual had been judged guilty of some crime and condemned by the gathering.

Generally, in such a contest, the first weapons to be thrown were the spears. The boomerangs were then released at any portion of

¹⁶Ibid.

the body, and finally clubs were used.

As the battle raged, the gins often entered the ring to encourage their men, and invariably ended up scrapping with each other. A rest was called every ten to fifteen minutes, to allow the combatants to recover and the weapons to be collected. If a serious injury occurred, the battle ceased long enough for the victim to be moved to safety.

Fair play was strictly adhered to, and during the tournament it was not unusual for members of another tribe to come to the assistance of, and join forces with, a weaker group.

Fighting continued until dark and resumed again at sunrise, lasting for several more hours.

Evidently, these tournaments served to settle tribal problems, and, at the same time, provide a source of amusement and promote social intercourse.

In contrast to the previously described tournament, the aborigines of South Australia used toy spears as the principal weapons at their inter-tribal meetings.¹⁷ Two types of spears were made, and their use depended upon the type of tournament. The smaller version was made of reed, with a ball of grass tightly wound around the tip. The ball, sometimes dipped in water to harden it, helped to keep the toy on a level plane during flight, and to prevent injury. The opposing tribes assembled close together in two irregular rows, without shields, and threw their

¹⁷W. A. Cawthorne, "Rough Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Natives," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch, 27:54-55, 1927.

missiles in alternate volleys.

The second, and larger spear, made of gum-wood, had its end blunted against a stone before use. The opposing tribes, heavily ornamented, faced each other across the tournament area. One party then rushed the other, and threw their weapons from a distance of about five or six yards. Their opposition stood firm and defended themselves from this attack with their shields. The attacking group retreated to a defensive position, while their opponents gathered up the spears in readiness for their assault. In spite of a friendly beginning, Cawthorne recalls that it was ". . . a common occurrence to end their plays with a battle."¹⁸

II. PASTIMES DERIVED FROM POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

GROUP PASTIMES

A. Avoid the Boomerang (Dexterity, Vertigo)

In the Boulia district of Queensland, the natives were able to describe a figure of eight with their returning boomerangs, illustrated in Figure 26. A popular pastime in this area was for six or more men to line up in Indian file, with their arms outstretched and their hands gripping the shoulders of the person in front.¹⁹ One native stood some distance ahead, facing the foremost member of the file, and threw his boomerang over their heads, as shown in Figure 27. The players closely

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:512-513, 1903.

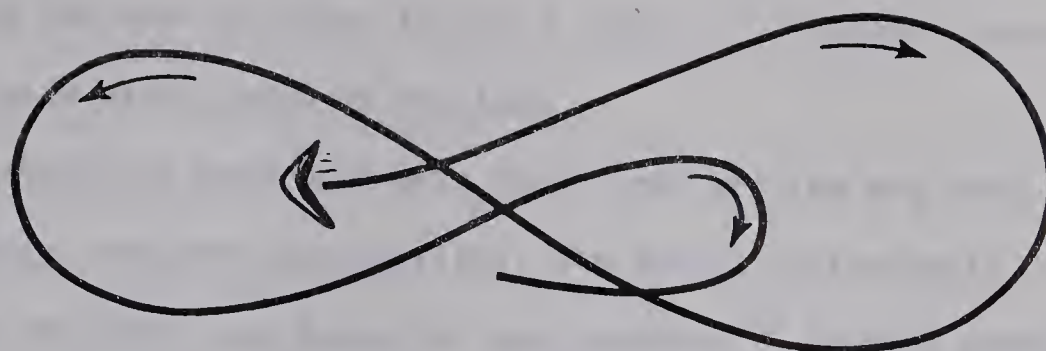


FIGURE 26 THE PATH OF A RETURNING BOOMERANG,
BOULIA, QUEENSLAND²⁰

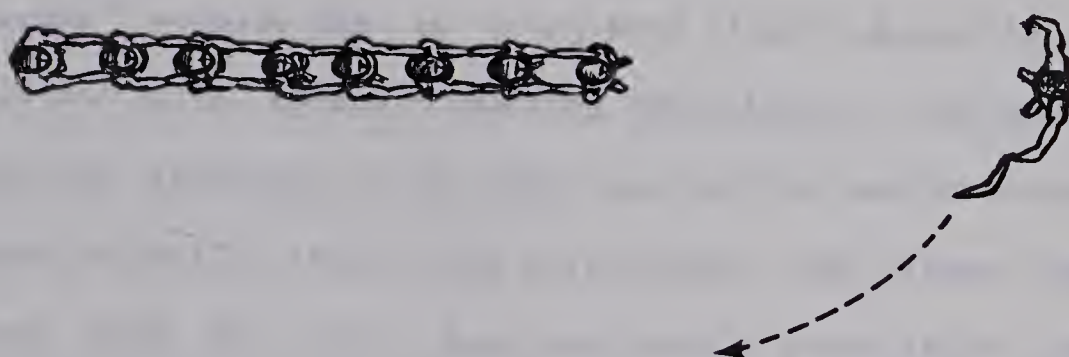


FIGURE 27 AVOID THE BOOMERANG²¹

followed its path through the air, and attempted to avoid being struck by the weapon as it descended. Each participant took his turn at throwing the implement. The skill of each thrower was such that he was able to vary the flight of the boomerang at will, thus introducing an element of surprise into the activity.

B. Water Catch (Pursuit, Strategy)

Catching was a favourite game in and around the water's edge. The

²⁰Ibid., Plate XXXII.

²¹W. E. Roth, Ethnographical Studies among the North-Western Central Queensland Aborigines (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1897), Figure 311.

children swam, dived, splashed, hid behind rocks and water bushes, or ran through the shallow water to avoid capture.²² Pastimes identical in nature were also played on the land.

It should be mentioned here that forms of hide and seek, discussed previously, may have had political overtones, particularly in the case where the hider was pummelled upon capture,²³ perhaps symbolic of his treatment at the hands of an enemy.

C. Mud Fights (Imitation)

Basedow²⁴ records that the young boys often indulged in sham fights with mud balls. Before commencing their battle, they smeared their bodies with mud, imitative of the ochre worn by the warriors when they were engaged in battle. After sides were chosen, they aligned themselves, face to face, along the river's bank and, upon a given signal, began bombarding each other with balls of mud. They endeavoured to dodge their opponents' missiles with as little movement as possible, slightly twisting the body, or lifting a limb, to permit the ball to pass.

The men also amused themselves by throwing mud. Two men danced about in front of the onlookers, while arming themselves with balls of mud. "First one man . . . held out his cheek for a mud ball, then,

²²W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 10.

²³Basedow, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

²⁴Ibid., p. 75.

receiving it, he threw one back and held out the other cheek, and so on . . ."²⁵ until both were completely covered with mud.

On Sunday Island, this particular pastime was modified slightly with the arrival of the European and his domesticated animals. While the objective remained the same, the missiles employed were " . . . consolodated cakes of cow-dung."²⁶ These were often thrown by teams of young girls, stationed several chains apart. A witness²⁷ stated that the missiles were skillfully thrown, each player allowing for curvature during flight.

On this island, the more skillful children occasionally threw flat slabs of stone at their opponents.

Some of the Tasmanian natives apparently indulged in a similar pastime during the winter months, employing snow balls as their weapons.²⁸ On the same island, pieces of kelp were often used as missiles during these mock battles.²⁹

III. GAMES DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

GROUP GAMES

A. Target and Distance Throwing (Dexterity)

²⁵Petrie, op. cit., p. 113.

²⁶Basedow, op. cit., p. 78.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Plomley, op. cit., p. 200.

²⁹Ibid., p. 658.

Both the men and boys pitted their skill against each other with the spear, and sometimes the war boomerang,³⁰ in target and distance throwing events.

The Tasmanian natives made small spears which they threw at trees. It is interesting to note that on this island, the various tribes associated different species of trees with their enemies, while regarding one particular variety as their own kin. The natives:

. . . of Oyster Bay spear the stringy bark tree, peppermint trees, and honeysuckle trees. The gum trees they claim as theirs and call them countrymen. The stringy bark trees the Brune call theirs, as being their countrymen, the peppermint the Cape Portland call theirs, and the Swanport claim the honeysuckle. Thus, if the natives of Oyster Bay spear the trees of another native, they are much annoyed and go and pull them out.³¹

These same aborigines often broke down small trees and used them as targets. Occasionally, the broken trees were propped up with sticks before being used for target practice.³²

The natives of Torres Strait played a similar game, the target being a tree trunk some five inches in diameter. The competitors threw their spears in turn from a distance of about thirty yards. " . . . about ten per cent. of the javelins struck the stump, some being hurled with such force that the points projected through on the other side" ³³

³⁰Worsnop, loc. cit.

³¹Plomley, op. cit., p. 269.

³²Ibid., p. 559.

³³A. C. Haddon, "The Ethnography of the Western Tribe of Torres

The warriors of south-western Australia selected a small bough, high up on a large tree, as one of their targets,³⁴ while their sons often used small sandhills for a similar purpose.³⁵

Several authors³⁶ have indicated that the natives had little difficulty in hitting a stationary target fifty to sixty yards away, however, fewer hits were recorded on targets which moved at the pace of a running man.³⁷

In all cases, the spear closest to the centre of the selected mark determined the winner. In some areas, prizes were given to the outstanding marksman.³⁸

Competitions in distance spear throwing were popular in most areas.

Straits," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 19:332, 1890.

³⁴E. Hassell, "Notes on the ethnology of the Wheelman tribe of Southwestern Australia," Anthropos, D. S. Davidson, editor. 31: 687, 1936.

³⁵R. M. Berndt, "Some Aboriginal Children's Games," Mankind, No. 9, 2:291, October, 1940.

³⁶J. Browne, "The Aborigines of Australia," Canadian Journal of Industry, Science and Art, No. 3, 1856, p. 270; and J. H. Clark, Field Sports, etc., etc., of the Native Inhabitants of New South Wales (London: E. Orme, 1813), p. 11.

³⁷L. E. Sheard, An Australian youth among desert Aborigines: journal of an expedition among the Aborigines of Australia (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1964), p. 35.

³⁸W. R. Smith, Myths and Legends of the Australian Aborigines (London: George G. Harrap and Company, 1930), p. 238.

On Melville Island, the warriors, during such competitions, threw their ten and one-half feet long spears without the use of woomeras. Spencer,³⁹ witnessing one game, measured the winning throw at 143 feet, five inches.

Inter-tribal contests were held by some of the South Australian natives.⁴⁰ Teams, selected from each tribe, competed against each other for distance, using reed spears about six feet in length.

In most areas, boys, without using a woomera, were able to cast their small weapons to distances of up to ninety feet.⁴¹ Many of the more experienced men, using a woomera, had little difficulty in throwing their missiles approximately one hundred yards.⁴²

B. Stick Fighting (Dexterity)

Small spears, or sticks of an equivalent size, were used by the men for a game similar in form to the quarter-staff fighting of early England. The stick, held at each end, was used in the manner found to be the most effective by the combatant to upset or disarm his opponent.

The native girls played a similar game with a stick, each striking alternately at their opponent's foot. As the blow was delivered,

³⁹B. Spencer, Wanderings in Wild Australia (London: Macmillan and Company, 1928), p. 690.

⁴⁰Smith, loc. cit.

⁴¹C. Duguid, No Dying Race (London: Angus and Robertson, 1963), p. 83.

⁴²K. Birket-Smith, Primitive Man and his Ways (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1960), p. 16; and Sheard, loc. cit.

the defending player endeavoured to escape it, or block it with her stick.⁴³

Occasionally, the whole body became a target.⁴⁴ In preparation for such matches, the girls "hardened" their heads during training sessions:

. . . they stand face to face, with the palms of their hands pressed tightly together. Presently one voluntarily bows her head, when the other immediately gives her a severe crack over the scalp with the small finger side of her hands. Then the other has a turn; and the process may be repeated.⁴⁵

Games of this nature prepared the girls for duels that had to be fought in later years. These duels possibly had ceremonial overtones.

TEAM GAME

Mock Battle (Dexterity)

Among some of the south-western New South Wales and western Victorian tribes, inter-tribal competitions were organised to test the weapon throwing and defensive skills of the various warriors. Each team consisted of ten to twelve of the tribes best warriors, each armed with a boomerang and shield. Prior to the contest, they painted white stripes across their cheeks and noses. When all was in readiness, the two teams aligned themselves in separate ranks, about twenty paces apart, facing each other. "Each individual has a right to throw his

⁴³Basedow, op. cit., p. 87.

⁴⁴Hassell, loc. cit.

⁴⁵Basedow, loc. cit.

boomerang at anyone on the other side, and step out of the rank into the intervening space to do so. The opposite party take their turn and so on alternately" ⁴⁶

A boy tended each warrior, collecting and returning his boomerang after it was thrown.

The game terminated when a player was struck with a boomerang, the tribe throwing it being declared the winner of that game.

The elders of the various tribes acted as judges, and ensured fair play during the tournament.

IV. GAMES DERIVED FROM POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

GROUP GAMES

A. The Kangaroo Rat or Weet Weet (Dexterity)

This wooden toy which possibly evolved from the throwing club, was found in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, southern Central Australia, the extreme south-eastern corner of Western Australia and some of the Torres Strait Islands. ⁴⁷

Its shape varied only slightly between the tribes within which it was used. Normally, it was constructed from a long, thin rod, some

⁴⁶J. Dawson, Australian Aborigines: the language and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the Western district of Victoria, Australia (Melbourne: G. Robertson, 1881), p. 77.

⁴⁷D. S. Davidson, "The Pacific and circum-Pacific appearances of the dart-game," Journal of the Polynesian Society, No. 3, 45:110, 1936; and H. Damm, "Das Känguruhratte-Spiel der Australier," Ethnologischer Anzeiger, No. 2, 4:60-67, 1936.

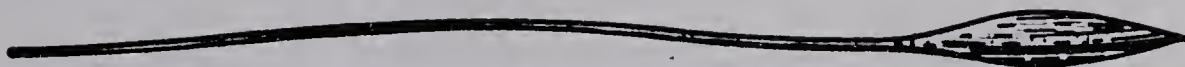


FIGURE 28 VICTORIAN WEET WEET⁴⁸



FIGURE 29 WESTERN AUSTRALIAN WEET WEET⁴⁹



FIGURE 30 CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN WEET WEET⁵⁰

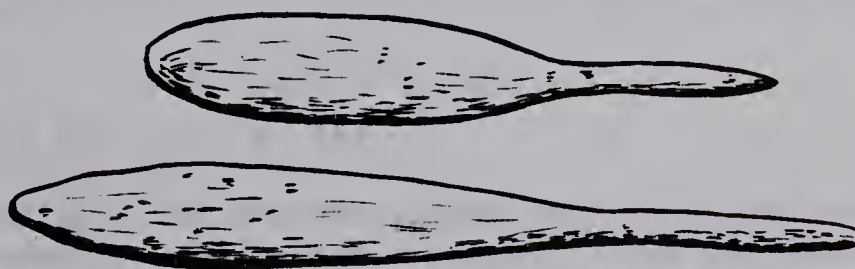


FIGURE 31 TORRES STRAIT WEET WEETS⁵¹

⁴⁸Smyth, op. cit., Figure 170.

⁴⁹Davidson, op. cit., Figure 4.

⁵⁰Damm, op. cit., Illustration 3.

⁵¹A. C. Haddon, (ed.), Report of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, vol. IV, 1912, Figure 264.

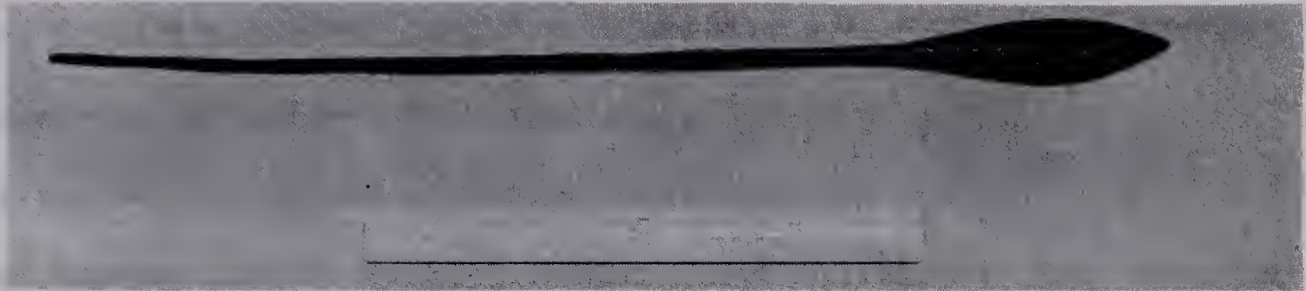


FIGURE 32 QUEENSLAND WEET WEET

two feet, ten inches in length, with a conical head, five inches long and one and one-half inches in diameter.⁵² It was made of a single piece of wood, as shown in Figures 28 to 32, and weighed less than two ounces. In two areas of Victoria,⁵³ however, the hardwood head was joined to the rod with twine and gum. Several reports⁵⁴ indicate that the tail was made of reed. The value of this type of toy lay in

⁵²Worsnop, op. cit., p. 167.

⁵³P. Beveridge, "On the Aborigines inhabiting the Great Lacustrine and Riverine Depression of the Lower Murray, Lower Murrumbidgee, Lower Lachlan and Lower Darling," Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales, 17:53, 1883; W. E. Stanbridge, "Some particulars of the general characteristics, astronomy and mythology of the tribes in the Central part of Victoria, Southern Australia," Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London, 1:297, 1861; Davidson, loc. cit.; and Smyth, op. cit., p. 352.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 49; and J. F. Hobbs, "Australian Aboriginal Sports and Wood-Craft," Outing, 31:452, 1898.

Photograph: Courtesy of The Australian Museum.

the fact that when thrown, the tail splintered easily, thus, by being detachable, the valuable head could be re-used.

The toy of the Central Australian natives was slightly longer, the overall length being approximately three and one-half feet,⁵⁵ and more streamlined than that used elsewhere (Figure 30). The Murray Islanders played with a smaller implement, six and one-half to eight and one-half inches long,⁵⁶ that closely resembled a club, depicted in Figure 31.

The game of kangaroo rat, so called because the implement's flying leaps and trailing tail resembled the rodent of that name in flight,⁵⁷ was played in a similar manner by all tribes. The toy was thrown by the competitors onto a pre-arranged area, from which it gained impetus and slid or bounded along the ground, with each participant attempting to gain the greatest distance.

The game was played on a flat, smooth area, some three to four hundred yards long.⁵⁸ The starting point, at one end of the area, often consisted of a small artificial or natural mound of earth,⁵⁹

⁵⁵Basedow, op. cit., pp. 82-83; and Damm, op. cit., pp. 60-67.

⁵⁶A. C. Haddon, (ed.), Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, 4:317, 1912.

⁵⁷E. H. Knight, "Savage Weapons at the Centennial Exhibition," Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institute, 1879, p. 229.

⁵⁸Beveridge, loc. cit.

⁵⁹Davidson, op. cit., p. 109; and Smyth, op. cit., p. 352.

off which the players bounced their toys. Haddon⁶⁰ states that the Torres Strait natives often played while walking along the beach at low tide, and not from any one fixed point.

In order to cast the implement, the competitor stood with his back to the direction of the throw:

In the hollow of the palm of his right hand he placed the thin end of the Weet-weet, grasping it lightly with the thumb and first and second fingers, and slightly doubling inwards the third and fourth, and then held it horizontally, nearly level with his forehead, very tenderly holding the tip of the head between the finger and thumb of the left hand.⁶¹

He then ran several steps backwards, turned swiftly, and with an under-hand throw, ricocheted the implement off the small pile of earth some fifteen to twenty feet away.⁶²

The behaviour of such a toy was recorded by Knight:

It does not rise more than nine feet above the surface of the ground and the distance it reaches depends upon the force of the projection and also upon the angle at which it first strikes the surface of the earth. If the trajectory is too high it makes a number of high leaps and soon tires; if too low, its force is soon expended in friction on the ground.⁶³

According to Beveridge,⁶⁴ the natives along the Murray River

⁶⁰A. C. Haddon, "The Ethnography of the Western Tribe of Torres Straits," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 19:360, 1890.

⁶¹Smyth, loc. cit.

⁶²C. Diem, Welt geschichte des Sports (Stuttgart: Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1960), p. 91.

⁶³Knight, loc. cit.

⁶⁴Beveridge, loc. cit.

were capable of throwing the toy four hundred yards.

In central and north Australia, the weet weet was thrown so as to first hit the top of a small bush or tussock of grass.⁶⁵

Although most tribes threw the toy underhand, two witnesses⁶⁶ have stated that it was first swung around the head, indicating an over or side arm delivery.

In general the players competed solely for distance,⁶⁷ and in one area an ". . . award is given to those who throw it to the greatest distance."⁶⁸

Along the eastern Murray River, however, ". . . umpires were appointed to . . . count the number of hops for each contestant."⁶⁹

This implement was sometimes thrown at a bark disc, from a distance of thirty to forty yards.⁷⁰ Each player threw the toy while moving forward, and attempted to hit the disc or land his implement as close as possible to it.

⁶⁵W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:511, 1903; and Basedow, loc. cit.

⁶⁶Dawson, op. cit., p. 86; and Stanbridge, loc. cit.

⁶⁷Worsnop, op. cit., p. 166; and Petrie, op. cit., p. 109.

⁶⁸Dawson, loc. cit.

⁶⁹F. D. McCarthy, "Aborigines: Games and Pastimes," The Australian Encyclopaedia (Sydney: Halstead Press, 1958), I, 37.

⁷⁰Worsnop, loc. cit.; Smyth, op. cit., p. 178; and Smith, op. cit., p. 60.

Although Beveridge⁷¹ states that both sexes from the age of eight onwards played with this toy, other authors⁷² maintain that the females never took part in throwing the kangaroo rat.

B. Miniature Throwing Clubs (Dexterity)

These small throwing sticks were used for competitions by the Euahlayi tribe of the Murray River,⁷³ and by the north-western central Queensland natives.⁷⁴ The clubs were somewhat similar in shape to the weet weet, but smaller - twelve to twenty inches long, and slightly heavier, weighing approximately three ounces.

Held by the narrow end, the toy was thrown overhand at the top of a small bush, five to eight feet high. If a bush were not handy, a leafy branch, held in position by another participant, was used in its place. The Queensland natives threw their toy at an overhanging branch of a tree, six to nine feet above the ground. "Immediately upon striking the obstacle . . . the stick shoots through the air, knob foremost, and with greater impetus to a distance quite half as much again than would otherwise be traversed."⁷⁵ It was not unusual for these toys to travel

⁷¹Beveridge, loc. cit.

⁷²Worsnop, op. cit., p. 165; Petrie, loc. cit.; and Smyth, op. cit., p. 178.

⁷³Parker, op. cit., p. 128.

⁷⁴W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:511, 1903.

⁷⁵Ibid.

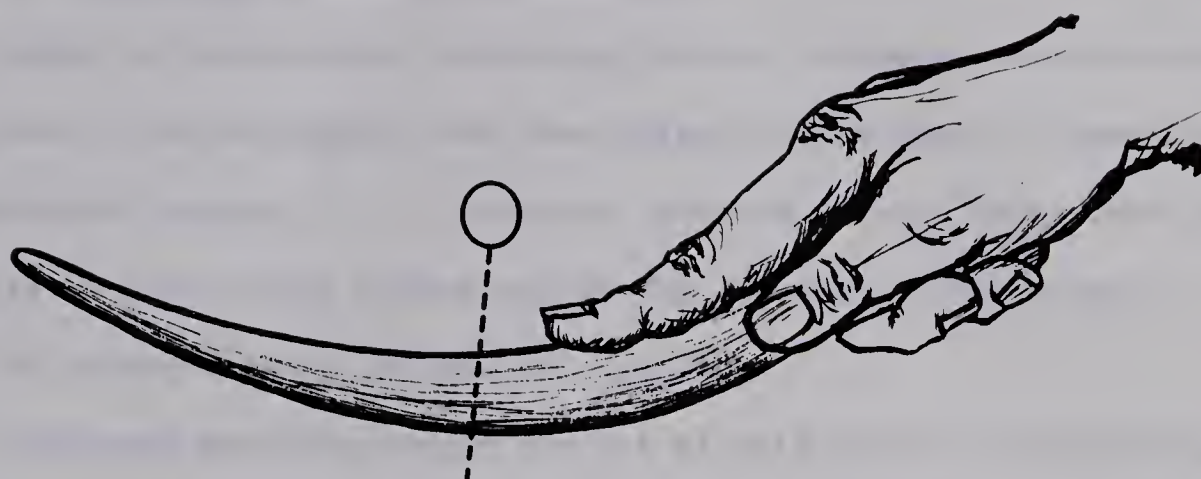


FIGURE 33 KANDI-KANDI, QUEENSLAND⁷⁶

three hundred yards before touching the ground.⁷⁷

In the Boulia and Cloncurry districts of Queensland, another type of toy throwing stick was used.⁷⁸ Known locally as the kandi-kandi, it resembled a boomerang in shape, and indeed, may have been one step in the evolution of that weapon. Between twelve and eighteen inches long, thick, rounded, and pointed at both extremities, it was held in the hand with the convex side forward, and the forefinger extended along the back (Figure 33). When thrown downward against a log or a thick branch, it rose into the air in a straight direction, revolving

⁷⁶Ibid., Plate XXXII.

⁷⁷Parker, loc. cit.

⁷⁸W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 19.

during flight in a horizontal plane.

C. Wrestling (Dexterity, Strategy)

Games of this nature, involving physical contact, were particular favourites of the aboriginal men. Barrington states that, if when the children were playing, ". . . a blow or push of greater force than seems requisite is given, they return one of the same kind with an equal spirit of retaliation as the men."⁷⁹

The young men were taught the art of this sport at an early age, for proficiency in wrestling was ". . . necessary to the safety of an Aboriginal, who has often to trust his strength and skill in single-handed encounters with members of strange tribes"⁸⁰

Matches were held on a cleared space, often a disused initiation ground, some eight yards in diameter.

A combatant, stationed in the centre of the area, issued a challenge to one of the surrounding competitors by throwing dust towards him.⁸¹ His challenge being accepted, the wrestler fought until either he or his opponent had been thrown three times, whereupon the match was terminated. In the Murray River district, however, one throw was sufficient to end a bout.⁸² Another pair of wrestlers then moved to

⁷⁹G. Barrington, History of New South Wales (London: W. Flint, 1802), p. 21.

⁸⁰Smyth, op. cit., p. 177.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 180.

⁸²Ibid.

the centre of the area and began their match.⁸³

The style of wrestling differed between tribes. Worsnop reports that in some Victorian tribes "the contestants place their hands on each others' shoulders, moving hither and thither, pushing and pulling, and struggling hard . . . until at last one of them falls."⁸⁴ A similar style of wrestling is recorded by Dawson⁸⁵ among the New South Wales natives; however, in this area, tripping was banned as it was not considered a fair test of strength. These same tribes matched the various winners and continued their tournament until the last bout decided the overall champion. Beveridge,⁸⁶ however, states that in some of the southern New South Wales tribes the competitors could, and did, use their legs, entwining them around their opponent to prevent being thrown to the ground. The victorious wrestler, after a brief rest, then continued to challenge the other contenders ". . . meeting rival after rival until he disposes of all . . . or he himself is brought to grief by someone abler or fresher."⁸⁷

The Queensland natives, upon accepting a challenge, gripped their opponent around the loins with both hands, fingers interlocking. The latter remained passive, with his arms raised above his head. The

⁸³Dawson, op. cit., p. 84.

⁸⁴Worsnop, op. cit., p. 166.

⁸⁵Dawson, loc. cit.

⁸⁶Beveridge, op. cit., pp. 51-52.

⁸⁷Ibid.

challenged then attempted to throw his opposite number onto the ground:

Honours are divided so long as he touches ground with his feet i. e. not off balance. The individual who is temporarily gripped may, however, steady himself with his arms on the other's shoulders, and usually prepares himself for a fall on his feet by keeping his lower limbs strongly flexed, thus rendering them springy on whichever side he may be thrown. There is no mutual clutching, or both combatants falling.⁸⁸

After each bout, the victorious wrestler was challenged by another.

It is interesting to note that in some areas, the competitors, prior to wrestling, covered their bodies in wood ash to prevent their opponent's holds from slipping,⁸⁹ while elsewhere, they used oil⁹⁰ to prevent the other wrestler securing a firm grip.

One author⁹¹ stated that the women and children were not permitted to be present at such contests.

TEAM GAMES

A. Intra- and Inter-tribal Wrestling (Dexterity, Strategy)

Smyth⁹² witnessed a wrestling match between two groups of young men from one Victorian tribe. The teams sat facing each other across a cleared space. A member of one team issued a challenge to one of the

⁸⁸W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:507-508, 1903.

⁸⁹Dawson, loc. cit.

⁹⁰Beveridge, loc. cit.

⁹¹Dawson, loc. cit.

⁹²Smyth, loc. cit.

opposition by throwing dust towards him, the challenge being answered in a similar fashion. After the bout was completed, a new combatant from each team entered the circle, and so on, until all the members of both teams had wrestled.

Here also, the participants, prior to wrestling, covered their bodies with ashes, and often paused during a bout to renew the ash on their hands.

Smyth gives no indication as to how the winning team was determined. He does, however, mention that many of the onlookers were women and children.⁹³

The aborigines of the Euahlayi tribe wrestled family clan against family clan during their game of goomboobooddoo. A mudgee, or painted stick, adorned with feathers, was placed in the centre of a cleared area by a member of one team, who then stationed himself in front of it. One of the opposing team entered the circle and attempted to reach the mudgee by overpowering its guardian. "Into the ring will go others of each side wrestling in their turn. The side that finally throws the most men, and gets the mudgee, wins."⁹⁴

Before starting this game, the men spent a considerable amount of time greasing their bodies to make them as slippery as possible.

Smith⁹⁵ gives an account of an intertribal wrestling match,

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Parker, op. cit., p. 129.

⁹⁵Smith, op. cit., pp. 236-238.

conducted in the same manner as those of the Euahlayi tribe. The basic difference was that a newly made boomerang and waddy were placed in the centre, instead of a mudgee. One team of wrestlers was appointed to guard the weapons. The opposing team sent in its combatants, one at a time, in an attempt to reach the weapons. As the attacker disposed of one defender, he was confronted by another, and so on until he was defeated, whereupon a team member would take over. This continued until the attacking team was all defeated, or had reached the weapons in the centre. The victorious team had the right to select one of the weapons as a prize.

After resting for an hour, the teams reversed their roles, the attackers becoming the defenders, and the game continued until the other weapon had been won. Prior to the contest, the wrestlers smeared their bodies with oil and red ochre.

In describing this game, Smith⁹⁶ makes reference to a match referee, but does not state his duties or qualifications.

A small tuft of emu feathers served as the goal of yet another inter-tribal wrestling game.⁹⁷ The male members of one tribe attempted to keep the feathered prize among themselves, while the opposing tribe endeavoured to capture it. The defenders sometimes joined hands and formed a ring around their team member who was responsible for carrying

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Smyth, op. cit., p. 180.

the feathers.⁹⁸ Should the ring be broken, the holder of the feathers threw it to a friendly player, who either passed it on, or sought protection from his team-mates.⁹⁹ This "all-in" wrestling match sometimes lasted for a whole day, and involved as many as several hundred men.¹⁰⁰

B. Tug-of-War (Exultation)

The McDonnell and Batavia River aborigines of Queensland played a form of tug-of-war. Instead of pulling against a rope, the two teams pushed against a pole, twelve to fifteen feet in length. Roth remarked that ". . . the fun consists mainly in balancing the pole in statu quo side against side for a few minutes, and then letting it fall with a deep grunt of relief."¹⁰¹

The games and pastimes described in this section played an important role in developing the skills necessary to ensure success in a dangerous situation. As such, many revolved around warfare, incorporating both armed and unarmed combat.

The playthings employed for these activities had evolved from, or were, actual fighting weapons.

Largely competitive in nature, the games and pastimes were played

⁹⁸Smith, op. cit., pp. 238-239.

⁹⁹Cawthorne, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

¹⁰⁰Smith, loc. cit.

¹⁰¹W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 17.

mainly by the males, for tribal safety was their responsibility.

A breakdown of games and pastimes of a political nature and the associated characteristics of each are presented in Table II. The following abbreviations are used:

C	Chance	I	Imitation
D	Dexterity	P	Pursuit
E	Enigma	S	Strategy
e	Exultation	V	Vertigo

TABLE II
THE CHARACTERISTICS AND FREQUENCY OF GAMES AND PASTIMES
ASSOCIATED WITH POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

	C	D	E	e	I	P	S	V
GROUP PASTIMES								
Sham fights		x			x			
Inter-tribal tournaments		x					x	
Avoid the boomerang		x						x
Water catch						x	x	
Mud fights					x			
GROUP GAMES								
Target and distance throwing		x						
Stick fighting		x						
The kangaroo rat or weet weet		x						
Miniature throwing clubs		x						
Wrestling		x					x	
TEAM GAMES								
Mock battle		x						
Intra- and inter-tribal wrestling		x					x	
Tug-of-war				x				

Total Play Activities of a Political Nature

Pastimes
Individual - Nil
Group - 5

TABLE II (continued)

Games	
Group	- 5
Team	- 3

Frequency of Predominant Play Characteristics

Dexterity	- 10
Strategy	- 4
Imitation	- 2
Exultation	- 1
Pursuit	- 1
Vertigo	- 1
Enigma	- Nil
Chance	- Nil

CHAPTER IV

DOMESTIC ASPECTS

The games and pastimes discussed in this chapter stem from the daily camp life activities of the aborigines, and from the life cycle of the family and its immediate members. The play activities of the children were largely imitative of their elders, centering around their camp duties, together with birth, marriage and old age.

The education of the children was quite informal prior to initiation, with the child learning by participating in the life of the community.¹ While the small boys practised carpentry, making domestic utensils and weapons, the girls learned how to weave, construct shelters and prepare food for the males.²

From these activities evolved their pastimes, such as playing at house. The boys, too young to accompany the men, often joined with the girls in their play.

Interestingly enough, only two games have been recorded, and these were both played by the men, indicating that their prime responsibilities lay more in the areas of hunting and defence. Indeed, the

¹R. M. Berndt and C. H. Berndt, The World of the First Australians: An Introduction to the Traditional Life of the Australian Aborigines (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1964), p. 132.

²H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), p. 85; and R. B. Smyth, The Aborigines of Victoria: with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other parts of Australia and Tasmania, compiled from various sources for the government of Victoria, Vol. I (Melbourne: Government Printing Office, 1878), p. 50.

stamina required for one of the games could well have supplemented their training for these activities.

I. PASTIMES ASSOCIATED WITH DOMESTIC ASPECTS

INDIVIDUAL PASTIMES

A. Dolls (Imitation)

Although not common to all tribes, the dolls of the native girls took on a variety of shapes. Basedow³ mentions that a plain stick or stone, with a knob at one end to represent the head, and painted in red ochre, was often carried by the girls.

On the Gulf of Carpentaria, make-believe babies were modelled out of mud, and given to the girls as playthings.⁴

Along Queensland's lower Tully River and at Cape Bedford, the girls fixed a forked stick onto the back of their necks, as Figure 34 illustrates, in imitation of a mother carrying a baby, with its legs dangling over the shoulders.⁵ Within these same tribes, a piece of lawyer-cane was split at one end and used in a similar fashion, ". . . each split half being bent and kinked so as to form a 'knee'; by pressure from above, these jointed legs can thus be made to assume different

³Basedow, op. cit., p. 80.

⁴D. F. Thomson, "Childhood and Play Among the Australian Aborigines," Melbourne Age, September 3, 1955.

⁵W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 13.

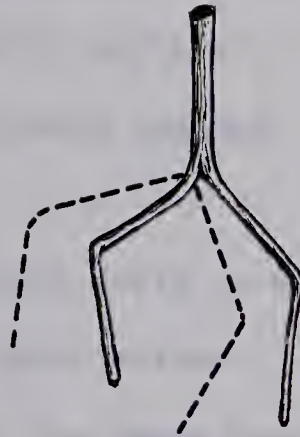
FIGURE 34⁶FIGURE 35⁷FIGURE 36⁸

FIGURE 37

ABORIGINAL DOLLS, QUEENSLAND

⁶Ibid., Plate I.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Australian National Committee for U.N.E.S.C.O., Australian Aboriginal Culture (Sydney: Government Printing Office, 1953), Figure 4.

Photograph: Courtesy of The Australian Museum.

and equally ridiculous positions" ⁹ Figure 35 outlines a doll fashioned from lawyer-cane. This type of plaything had no head or arms, and was not dressed or ornamented in any way.

The dolls were sometimes called kuchara, a term periodically applied to small babies.

The girls often carried their dolls in miniature dilly-bags, made solely for this purpose by their mothers.

In some Queensland tribes, the young females fashioned their "babies" from a piece of bark or stick, which was then wrapped in grass, ¹⁰ as shown in Figure 36. These were occasionally decorated with red or yellow ochre.

On Keppel Island, Roth ¹¹ observed both the women and girls nursing dolls in their arms. This plaything, some fifteen inches long, was cut in the form of a cone, from the base of a grass tree, and coloured with red ochre. A smaller version, approximately ten inches in length, from Queensland, is shown in Figure 37. There is some evidence to indicate that these dolls were regarded as fertility charms as well as playthings.

B. Granny (Imitation)

This pastime, played by the children of both sexes, was

⁹W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 13.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

encountered along Queensland's lower Tully River.¹² The mimic cupped one hand over his opposite armpit, and then sharply smacked the elbow of his free arm on his flank. As he performed this action, he called out the equivalent of "Granny, Granny".

The dialogue and the sounds produced indicate that this was a mimicry of being spanked for misbehaviour, by the old lady in question.

C. Weaving (Dexterity, Imitation)

Roth¹³ discovered the young boys of Cape Bedford, Queensland, happily passing the time by plaiting the handles of dilly-bags. Their works were largely imitative of the handles found among the more northern tribes of this state.

GROUP PASTIMES

A. Marriage (Imitation)

Playing "Grown-ups", "Marriage" or "House", in one form or another, was as common to the aboriginal children as it is to their white counterparts.

In the Cairns district of Queensland,¹⁴ the boys and girls attempted to lure each other into their small brushwood shelters, by making tempting, although imaginary, offers, such as yams, opossums

¹²W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:496, 1903.

¹³Ibid., p. 497.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 495.

and shells, each one vying with the other to make his own particular offer the more attractive.

Barrington wrote that:

. . . the sports of the native children are miniature exhibitions of the exercises of men . . . and from almost eight years old till they realise the scene, they amuse themselves with stealing the females as their fathers had formerly their mothers¹⁵

Although he does not clarify this "sport", he was possibly referring to a pastime similar in nature to one of the following.

On the Normanby River, small boys and girls, pretending to be married, built impromptu huts and sat contentedly in their shade, talking as adults would. Another boy ran forward and attempted to steal a "wife", whereupon a make-believe fight occurred between the "husband" and the would-be "wife-stealer".¹⁶

In other tribes, the boys and girls, after building their miniature huts, separated into couples and disappeared into the scrub together. "It is a game often being played," says Roth, "but whenever their parents catch them at it they generally give them both a good smacking."¹⁷

However, ". . . games of adultery . . ."¹⁸ in which a boy ran

¹⁵G. Barrington, History of New South Wales (London: W. Flint, 1802), p. 21.

¹⁶W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 13.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Berndt and Berndt, op. cit., p. 134.

off with another's wife were tolerated, provided that the children who participated in this promiscuous pastime did not refer to each other as son-in-law and mother-in-law.¹⁹

B. Families (Imitation)

The children, having constructed small windbreaks, often occupied them as ". . . 'father' or 'mother', with a number of 'children' to 'look after'."²⁰ If playmates were not available to act as "children", small objects, such as pieces of wood, stones, leaves and flowers, were chosen in their places. These items were placed in rows in front of the "parent" and allocated names. As the "parent" went about her "household duties", the "children" were moved around frequently and subjected to beatings and affection as the occasion demanded.

The children on Groote Eylandt used shells to represent the various members of their families.²¹ These were assembled and moved about in their various groupings as the play progressed.

On Keppel Island, the women and children indulged in a pastime, the meaning of which was unknown to Roth.²² A small cave, about eight to ten inches high, was constructed of rocks. The participant, kneeling

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Basedow, op. cit., p. 79.

²¹F. D. McCarthy, "Aborigines: Games and Pastimes," The Australian Encyclopaedia (Sydney: Halstead Press, 1958), I, 37.

²²W. E. Roth "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:495-496, 1903.

in front of the structure, rapidly cast small pebbles, apparently representing members of the family, with the right and left hand alternately, into the opening. ". . . these stones she catches up again, then throws them back, and so repeats the process over and over again."²³

Each player knelt in front of her own little stone "house", and the whole performance was accompanied by a chant. Apparently, the participants became greatly excited while playing and chanting together. There is a possibility that this pastime was of a religious nature.

C. Cooking (Imitation)

It was common, in most tribes, to find small girls "cooking" over imaginary fires in imitation of their elders.²⁴ They scooped out a shallow hole and filled it with cold ashes, to serve as a fireplace. When all was in readiness, leaves, pebbles, sticks and other similar items were placed on the ashes to represent the food. The "meal" was covered in sand in the orthodox way, and the girls sat and talked while it was "cooking". Their conversation revolved around the prospective feast, inviting others to share it with them, and explaining their methods of preparing it.²⁵

In some areas, the boys joined with the girls, and actually lit small fires to add realism to their play.²⁶

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Basedow, op. cit., p. 80.

²⁶Berndt and Berndt, loc. cit.



FIGURE 38 CRACKING BEANS²⁷

D. Cracking Beans (Imitation)

The children of the Tully River practised a pastime, in which they imitated the sound of a bean being cracked open with a stone, to extract the kernel.²⁸ The palms of the hands were held slightly apart, with the little and ring fingers interlocked. The tips of the fore and middle fingers were made to touch in such a way that the interdigital space between them was opened widely, as shown in Figure 38. A sharp vertical movement onto the knee below caused the fore and middle fingers to strike together, producing a sharp, cracking sound.

This pastime was often practised during the preparation of make-believe food.

²⁷W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), Plate XXVII.

²⁸Ibid., p. 14.

II. GAMES ASSOCIATED WITH DOMESTIC ASPECTS

TEAM GAMES

A. Firemaking Contest (Dexterity)

The following contest, involving a skill yet to be mastered by the European, was recorded by Duguid.²⁹

A small dry branch was split and the opening filled with powdered tinder. On each side of the branch was placed a small pile of dry grass. Teams, consisting of three boys, stationed themselves at each branch. Upon a signal, one lad began to work the hard edge of his woomera back and forth across the branch, while the other two steadied it. At the first sign of smoke, the smouldering tinder was carefully poured onto one pile of grass and the other placed on top of it. The three boys then worked together to produce a flame - two gently blowing, and the third waving a handful of grass over the smouldering heap.

Although this was only one of several methods of producing fire known to the aborigines, it was the only method recorded in a contest of this nature.

B. Mungan-Mungan (Pursuit, Strategy)

This game, played in the Northern Territory, pitted the old men against the younger males.³⁰ One old man cut and peeled a hibiscus

²⁹C. Duguid, No Dying Race (London: Angus and Robertson, 1963), p. 83.

³⁰W. E. Harney, "Sport and play amidst the Aborigines of the Northern Territory," Mankind, No. 9, 4:377-378, November, 1952.

branch, about two feet in length, and after permitting it to dry, painted it white. This stick then represented a Wormar, or young girl.

The old men summoned their friends from nearby tribes, with message sticks, and when all were gathered, they painted their bodies in readiness for the event. On a given signal, the maker of the stick moved to the centre of a cleared space, from where he challenged the youths to ". . . come and get the young girl."³¹ Obviously, the challenge was immediately answered.

To distinguish between the two sides during the game, the youths carried the Wormar under their armpits, while the old men held it behind their backs. Should the holder of the Wormar be tackled, he threw it on to a team member.

The game continued until one side became exhausted. The team holding the Wormar at this time hid it in the bush until the losing side was able to assemble a stronger team, and issue another challenge.

The similarity between this game and some of the team wrestling matches, described in Chapter III, are apparent, however, the significance of the Wormar justifies the inclusion of the game in this section.

It is interesting to note that all the pastimes reviewed here were played by the children. Although occasionally the small boys joined in, these pastimes appear to be basically girls' amusements, in so far as they imitate the activities of the tribal women. It could be surmised

³¹Ibid.

that play of this nature helped the girls to understand the responsibilities of motherhood.

A breakdown of games and pastimes of a domestic nature and the associated characteristics of each are presented in Table III. The following abbreviations are used:

C	Chance	I	Imitation
D	Dexterity	P	Pursuit
E	Enigma	S	Strategy
e	Exultation	V	Vertigo

TABLE III
THE CHARACTERISTICS AND FREQUENCY OF GAMES AND PASTIMES
ASSOCIATED WITH DOMESTIC ACTIVITIES

	C	D	E	e	I	P	S	V
INDIVIDUAL PASTIMES								
Dolls					x			
Granny					x			
Weaving		x			x			
GROUP PASTIMES								
Marriage					x			
Families					x			
Cooking					x			
Cracking beans					x			
TEAM GAMES								
Firemaking contest		x						
Mungan-mungan						x	x	

Total Play Activities of a Domestic Nature

Pastimes

Individual - 3

Group - 4

Games

Group - Nil

Team - 2

TABLE III (continued)

Frequency of Predominant Play Characteristics

Imitation	- 7
Dexterity	- 2
Pursuit	- 1
Strategy	- 1
Vertigo	- Nil
Chance	- Nil
Enigma	- Nil
Exultation	- Nil

CHAPTER V

CEREMONIAL RITES

The ceremonial aspect in the culture of the Australian aboriginal was an important one. All spheres of his life - survival, achievement of manhood, traditions, mythology and religion, were promoted through one type of ceremony or another.

It is to be expected that, with time, certain aspects of these rites, together with their associated pomp and pageantry, would become modified and converted to amusements.

It is interesting to note that of the childrens' pastimes recorded, all stemmed from sacred or semi-sacred ceremonies. Although the line of demarcation between these play activities and the rituals from which they evolved were apparent, the more sophisticated form of play, the game, did not develop. This indicates that while the adult population were willing to sanction "religious" play in its simple form, they were not prepared to allow it to develop to a point where it may have become sacreligious.

The social corroboree, basically an adult entertainment, probably developed of its own accord and not out of any religious ritual. The elaborate ornamentation of the performers and the associated paraphernalia, however, were, in all likelihood, suggested in part by earlier sacred practices.

I. PASTIMES ASSOCIATED WITH CEREMONIAL RITES

INDIVIDUAL PASTIME

The Bullroarer (Exultation)

One toy that originated from the native ceremonies was an object commonly known to European children as the "roarer", "whirring stick" or "whirler".

A flat piece of wood, three to six inches in length and one and one-half inches wide, was cut into a spindle shape and attached, by means of a hole drilled through one end, to a piece of twine.¹ The cord, sometimes made out of the sinews of a kangaroo's tail, was held in the hand, and the implement swung over the head.² In most tribes, however, the free end of the cord was tied to a small stick, some eighteen inches in length,³ as illustrated in Figure 39. The stick was held firmly in the hand and the smaller piece whirled rapidly above the player. The

¹W. A. Cawthorne, "Rough Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Natives," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch, 27:55, 1927.

²W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:500, 1903.

³Ibid.; R. B. Smyth, The Aborigines of Victoria: with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other Parts of Australia and Tasmania, compiled from various sources for the government of Victoria, Vol. I (Melbourne: Government Printing Office, 1878), pp. 176-177; T. Worsnop, The Prehistoric Arts, Manufactures, Works, Weapons, etc., of the Aborigines of Australia (Adelaide: Government Printing Office, 1897), p. 166; and J. F. Hobbs, "Australian Aboriginal Sports and Wood-Craft," Outing, 31:452, 1898.

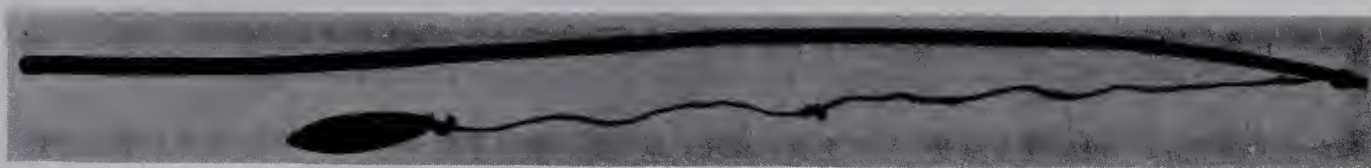


FIGURE 39 TOY BULLROARER, QUEENSLAND

humming sound was produced by the blade alternately presenting its flat surface and sharp edge to the air.

Smyth wrote that ". . . when the noise is the loudest . . . the player gives the instrument a sudden turn, causing it to make a report as loud as the crack of a stockman's whip."⁴

These small boards, sometimes with the end furthest from the aperture cut off, were often painted but never engraved.⁵

In the northern central Queensland area, the toy was used by both sexes, of any age, however, among adjacent tribes, the implement was a plaything of the men and boys only.⁶

On the Bloomfield River, the boys were permitted to play with them in public, but only after the technique of using the toy had been taught to them at their first initiation ceremony.⁷ In many areas, the

⁴Smyth, loc. cit.

⁵Roth, loc. cit.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

females were forbidden to view the toy.⁸

The Atherton aborigines of Queensland developed a toy "whirler" quite different in nature to the one described previously. Here, the boys selected a flat, light piece of wood, and holding it vertically, threw ". . . it face forwards against the air, so as to produce a humming sound."⁹

It should be mentioned that the larger bullroarer, up to twenty-seven inches long, was used only on sacred occasions and not as a play-thing.¹⁰

GROUP PASTIMES

A. Opossum (Dexterity, Vertigo)

Howitt,¹¹ studying initiation ceremonies of the Kurnai tribe near Gippsland, reported on a pastime played at the conclusion of one such ceremony.

The men cut down a young tree and trimmed its limbs so as to form a pole, approximately twenty feet long. After several branches were

⁸Cawthorne, loc. cit.; Hobbs, loc. cit.; and A. C. Haddon, "The Ethnography of the Western Tribe of Torres Straits," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 19:375, 1890.

⁹W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 15.

¹⁰Cawthorne, loc. cit.

¹¹A. W. Howitt, "The Jeraeil, or Initiation Ceremonies of the Kurnai Tribe," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 14:314, 1885.

tied at the upper end, its base was fixed firmly into the ground. The men, each holding a cluster of leaves in one hand, surrounded the "tree" and gripped the trunk with their free hands to steady it. In turn, the men scaled the pole, touching it only with the feet and hands, in imitation of an opossum, while the others below rustled their leaves and shouted, simulating the hunt.

Howitt states that apparently this pastime was not an integral part of the actual initiation ceremony, and was played only ". . . to amuse the boys"12

B. Spirits (Pursuit, Imitation)

The native children on Queensland's Bloomfield River enjoyed two pastimes in which the participants were pursued by evil spirits.

In one pastime, the children erected several small shelters, then pretending that it was night time, lay down to sleep. An evil spirit, appearing sometimes as a man and sometimes as a woman, entered the camp and, after selecting a victim, drove a sharp, red-hot digging stick into her. The wound inflicted supposedly never healed. The spirit then began to set alight to the camp, but was chased and captured by the children.

In the second, the spirit was an evil man, who made extremely unpleasant noises, similar to those made by a dying person.

Before letting captured players go, he tickled them ". . . until they are nearly dead from laughing"13

¹²Ibid.

¹³W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland

In his description, Roth¹⁴ gives no indication as to whether a native child pretended to be the spirit or whether the mythical demon was, in fact, a figment of the players' imaginations.

C. Koko (Imitation)

Played by the girls on the Murray Islands in the Torres Strait, koko was an enactment of a local myth. The girls, ostentatiously arrayed in flowers and leaves, walked into the ocean until the water level reached their shoulders. With their hands placed on the shoulders of the girl in front, they began to chant, bobbing up and down in the water in time to the rhythm. They then returned to the beach and, gripping pieces of charcoal in their hands, sat in a circle or semi-circle. Each child placed her hands on the sand, palms downwards, and, as they were rubbed backwards and forwards, repeated the equivalent of ". . . with fish teeth rub me, with bamboo knife rub me, with charcoal rub me."¹⁵ Their hands were then examined to see whether they were cut or marked by the piece of charcoal. "Should there be two marks they cry out, 'Ah! keg has killed a man,' and begin again."¹⁶

Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 10.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵A. C. Haddon, (ed.), Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, 4:318-319, 1912.

¹⁶Ibid.

D. Moon (Pursuit, Imitation)

This pastime, played by the children of Queensland's Cape Bedford, was, according to Roth,¹⁷ a remnant of some past tribal ceremony.

Pieces of stone and wood were gathered to represent food, and one piece given to each player. Two holes were then dug in the ground, one supposedly containing pure water, and the other, poisoned water. The children sat in a semi-circle around these holes, while one of their members, portraying the moon, hopped backwards towards them. Nearing the circle, the "moon" requested directions and was told that to her right was a stinging nettle. Hopping to her left, she was pinched on the leg by one of the children, the pinch representing the sting of a hornet. The "dying moon" attempted to drink the poisoned water, but was stopped by the group. In gratitude, she issued a piece of food to all, but instructed one player not to eat his. As soon as the "moon" disappeared, however, all the participants ate a portion of the forbidden food. The "moon", upon returning and finding the food gone, broke through the circle and chased the culprit until she succeeded in catching him.

E. Burning Skin (Imitation)

Basedow¹⁸ writes that the boys of the Kukata tribe had an amusement that prepared them for the pain of mutilation, inflicted at their

¹⁷W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 10.

¹⁸H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), pp. 87-88.

initiation ceremonies. The results of this pastime were perhaps also imitative of the initiation scars of their elders.

A small, red-hot coal was taken from the fire and momentarily cooled by covering it with a handful of sand. The coal was then placed on the forearm and touched with the red-hot point of a fire-stick until it glowed red again. It was left there until it turned to white ash, the burn resulting in a permanent scar. "Some of the lads," wrote Basedow, "have many of such marks upon both arms, and they seem quite proud of them."¹⁹

F. "Play About" Corroborees (Imitation, Exultation)

It was quite common for a group of uninitiated native boys to imitate the tribal men, by staging a "corroboree". Although, in the case of the more sacred ceremonies, the rituals were unknown to them, they took great delight in inventing their own.²⁰ An excellent account of one such pastime is given by Sheard,²¹ who writes that, after preparing their bodies with paint, the boys performed their dances for the women and small children.

Generally, their dances, too, were largely imitative of the adult versions. In the Frog Dance of the Arundta tribe:

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰S. D. Porteus, The Psychology of a Primitive People: a study of the Australian Aborigine (London: E. Arnold and Company, 1931), pp. 6-7.

²¹L. E. Sheard, An Australian youth among desert Aborigines: journal of an expedition among the Aborigines of Central Australia (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1964), p. 28.

The child adopts a sitting attitude and passes its arms from the outside, behind the knees, and forwards to the ground. In this position, it moves about on 'all fours', with a peculiar hopping motion, adding greatly to the hilarity of the meeting.²²

Porteus²³ states that in most tribes the men referred to pastimes of this nature as "play about" corroborees.

Occasionally, daylight corroborees were held by the women, and the men, if present at all, took little part. "In a certain sense, 'afternoon teas' . . . would give an idea of their relative importance."²⁴

G. The Tribal Corroboree (Exultation, Imitation)

Many different types of ceremonies and corroborees were held by the Australian aborigines. Some, such as the Bora and War Corroborees, were sacred and never performed in front of the women or the uninitiated boys.²⁵

The tribal corroboree, however, was a social affair.²⁶ While it was often organised to celebrate a momentous occasion, such as the

²²Basedow, op. cit., p. 70.

²³Porteus, op. cit., p. 19.

²⁴W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:516, 1903.

²⁵A. M. Duncan-Kemp, Where Strange Paths Go Down (Brisbane: Smith and Paterson Limited, 1964), p. 209; and T. M. Sutton, "The Adjardurah Tribe of Aborigines on Yorke's Peninsula: some of their early customs and traditions," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch, 2:19, 1890.

²⁶Cawthorne, op. cit., pp. 56-60.

successful return of the warriors,²⁷ or the presence of visitors,²⁸ it was more than often conducted solely for enjoyment.

On most occasions, this type of corroboree was an intra-tribal event, but periodically other tribes were invited to participate.²⁹ In many areas, message sticks, similar to those depicted in Figures 40 and 41, served to convey the invitation to adjacent tribes. In the case of the social corroboree, these sticks were carried by a young man, acting on his elders' orders, to the tribes concerned.³⁰

The corroborees were held on a cleared area reserved for the purpose, some distance from the camp. As the event did not begin until after sunset,³¹ and usually continued until sunrise, fires³² were kept

²⁷Basedow, op. cit., p. 84.

²⁸J. Browne, "The Aborigines of Australia," Canadian Journal of Industry, Science and Art, No. 3, 1856, p. 253.

²⁹K. L. Parker, The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia (London: A. Constable and Company, 1905), p. 68; and E. Palmer, "Notes on Some Australian Tribes," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 13:289-290, 1884.

³⁰A. W. Howitt, "Notes on Australian Message Sticks and Messengers," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 18:314-332, 1888.

³¹Roth, loc. cit.

³²J. Dawson, Australian Aborigines: the language and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the Western district of Victoria, Australia (Melbourne: G. Robertson, 1881), p. 82; H. Basedow, "Journal of the Government North-west Expedition," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch, 15:176, 1914: Worsnop, op. cit., p. 152; and T. L. Mitchell, Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia, with descriptions of the recently Explored Region of Australia Felix, and the present colony of New South Wales, Vol. II (London: T. and W. Boone, 1838), p. 4.

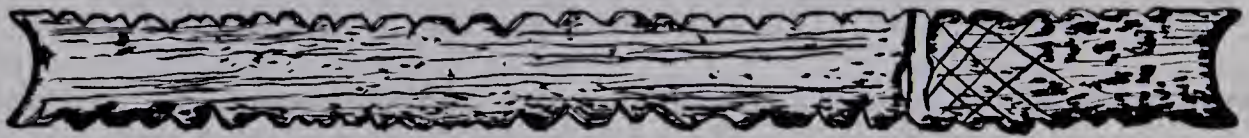


FIGURE 40 MESSAGE STICK, VICTORIA³³

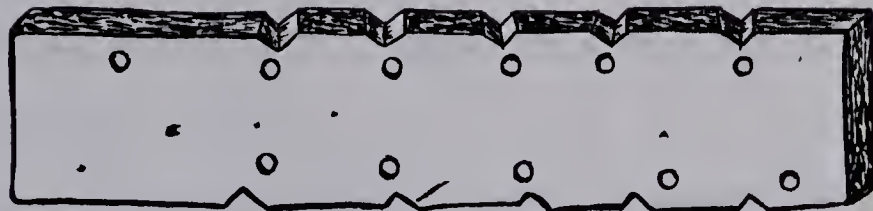


FIGURE 41 MESSAGE STICK, QUEENSLAND³⁴

burning around the clearing throughout the proceedings.

The corroboree was usually under the direction of a tribal elder or "songman", appointed to ensure that the programme ran smoothly, and that all present enjoyed themselves.³⁵ In general, the ceremony consisted of a series of dances, each accompanied by a song, and several brief

³³A. W. Howitt, "Notes on Australian Message Sticks and Messengers," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol. 18, 1888, Plate XIV.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵W. E. Stanbridge, "Some particulars of the general characteristics, astronomy and mythology of the tribes in the Central part of Victoria, South Australia," Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London, 1:296-297, 1861.

plays, encompassing both serious and humorous topics.³⁶ Dawson recalls that between each act, the gathering was entertained by several ". . . clowns . . . chosen for their powers of humour, ready wit, and repartee."³⁷

Each person present was expected to participate in some way.³⁸ In most regions, the women played a very restrained part in the corroboree, singing and keeping the rhythm, but leaving the dancing and acting to the males.³⁹ In several tribes, however, the women took an active part in the dancing, both joining in with the men and performing dances of their own.⁴⁰ It was unusual for a member of either sex to act the role of one of the opposite sex.⁴¹

Rarely were the children permitted to ornament their bodies, and only occasionally did the whole gathering decorate themselves.⁴² The dancers, however, spent a considerable amount of time and effort, prior

³⁶Roth, op. cit., p. 515; and Dawson, op. cit., p. 80.

³⁷Ibid., p. 83.

³⁸E. Hassell, "Notes on the ethnology of the Wheelman tribe of Southwestern Australia," Anthropos, D. S. Davidson, editor, 31:696-698, 1936.

³⁹Dawson, op. cit., p. 82; Browne, op. cit., pp. 253-254; Smyth, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 394; J. Cotton, "The Letters of a Pioneer," Pastures New, R. V. Bills and A. S. Kenyon, editors (Melbourne: Macmillan and Company, 1930), p. 238; and Porteus, op. cit., p. 59.

⁴⁰Parker, op. cit., p. 130; Sheard, op. cit., p. 29; and L. . Havemeyer, The Drama of Savage People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), p. 186.

⁴¹Roth, op. cit., p. 517.

⁴²Dawson, op. cit., p. 81; and H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), pp. 84-85.



FIGURE 42 CORROBOREE DECORATIONS, NORTHERN TERRITORY⁴³

to the corroboree, applying their ornamentation.⁴⁴ Figures 42 and 43 illustrate the artistic ability of these people.

Among the central Queensland tribes, dancers of the opposite sex were required to "dress" separately, and natives who had not previously

⁴³B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, The Native Tribes of Central Australia (London: Macmillan and Company, 1938), Figure 128.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 618-624; Mitchell, loc. cit.; and Worsnop, loc. cit.



FIGURE 43 CORROBOREE DECORATIONS, NORTHERN TERRITORY⁴⁵

witnessed the performance were not permitted near the dancers while they were preparing themselves.⁴⁶

In this same area, small shelters, constructed on the side of the corroboree ground, served both as a point of entrance and as a resting place for the performers.⁴⁷ Most tribes, however, simply reserved an area of the "stage" for this purpose.⁴⁸

The native dances were never performed unless accompanied by a song or chant. In general, apart from an occasional shout, the dancers

⁴⁵ Spencer and Gillen, op. cit., Figure 126.

⁴⁶ Roth, loc. cit.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Browne, loc. cit.

themselves did not join in with the singing.⁴⁹

Palmer described the subject matter of their routines as "parodies on scenes in life . . . worked up into song with a dance to match."⁵⁰

Common indeed were dances imitating the actions of the various bush animals. The dingo, wallaby, frog, butterfly and emu, along with many other creatures, became the central figures around which many performances revolved.⁵¹

Hassell⁵² records one such dance in which the central figure imitated the actions of a large kangaroo caught in a storm. The "kangaroo" attempted to shelter from the rain under a small tree, but was unable to keep his tail dry. On moving his tail under the tree, his head and feet became wet. "He made matters worse by picking leaves from the tree to cover his feet, and finally had to put his arms over his head."⁵³ The dance was accompanied by a song describing the animal's discomfort.

Of this type of dance, a witness wrote ". . . nothing could be more laughable, nor a more ingenious piece of mimicry. As is usual . . .

⁴⁹Roth, op. cit., pp. 515-516.

⁵⁰Palmer, loc. cit.

⁵¹J. H. Clark, Field Sports, etc., etc., of the Native Inhabitants of New South Wales (London: E. Orme, 1813), p. 18; Havemeyer, op. cit., p. 196; Smyth, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 166-176; Hassell, loc. cit.; and E. Grosse, "The Dance," Source Book for Social Origins, W. I. Thomas, editor (Boston: Bruce Humphries Incorporated, 1909), pp. 584-585.

⁵²Hassell, op. cit., p. 698.

⁵³Ibid.

the time was kept with an accuracy never at fault"54

Dances recalling past battle victories and hunting successes were extremely popular.⁵⁵ In most tribes, it was only during dances of this type that weapons were carried. These performances were usually of a serious nature, however, some were deliberately distorted, much to the amusement of the audience, who ridiculed the dancers for each exaggeration or mistake.⁵⁶

Popular, too, were "fun" dances, in which various members of the tribe were impersonated at work or play.⁵⁷ One native described this type of dance as being ". . . all fun and make believe"58

A description of a "love" dance, recorded by one explorer as being ". . . very immodest and lewd,"⁵⁹ is given by Grosse,⁶⁰ who states that they were commonly performed by the men.

A popular dance among many of the northern tribes was the Canoe

⁵⁴Smyth, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 173.

⁵⁵Hassell, op. cit., pp. 696-698; Grosse, loc. cit.; and J. K. Ewers, "Aboriginal Ballet," Walkabout, No. 2, 14:29-34, December 1, 1947.

⁵⁶Havemeyer, op. cit., pp. 191-192; and Browne, loc. cit.

⁵⁷Ewers, loc. cit.; Porteus, op. cit., p. 34; and H. Basedow, "Journal of the Government North-west Expedition," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch, 15:176, 1914.

⁵⁸W. E. Harney, Brimming Billabongs (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1963), p. 67.

⁵⁹Smyth, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 172.

⁶⁰Grosse, op. cit., pp. 585-586.

Dance, performed by both the men and the women.⁶¹

In the canoe-dance the bodies are painted . . . and sticks are used to represent the paddles. The men station themselves in two lines, each with a stick across his back, which is held by the arms, and they move their feet alternately to the tune of the song composed for the ceremony. At a given signal all bring their sticks to the front, and hold them as they do paddles, swaying themselves in regular time, as if they were paddling in one of their light canoes.⁶²

Inter-tribal trading, particularly in Arnhem Land, where as many as ten tribes gathered to trade, provided an ideal opportunity for the exchange of dances and songs. Normally, after trading was completed, each group was expected to participate in the "merry-making", by presenting songs and dances of their tribe. Several authors⁶³ have noted that the tribes did not mix during their dances, and often danced on separate nights.

As a result of these meetings, it was quite common for a tribe to present songs and dances at their corroborees, the meanings of which were entirely unknown to them.⁶⁴

In the field of dancing, the full blooded aborigine excelled. One renowned American dancer remarked of them:

. . . I have seen primitive native dancers, who, as expert choreographers and individual performers . . . could be taken right off the corroboree grounds, and transplanted onto the stage in New York

⁶¹Havemeyer, op. cit., pp. 186-187; and Grosse, loc. cit.

⁶²Smyth, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 174-175.

⁶³Dawson, op. cit., p. 83; and Smyth, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 392.

⁶⁴Palmer, loc. cit.; Spencer and Gillen, loc. cit.; and Porteus, op. cit., p. 114.

and Covent Gardens and be an immediate world sensation.⁶⁵

Their ability in this area stemmed from their love of dancing, and the considerable amount of time they devoted to this pastime.

At this point, brief reference should be given to the musical instruments most frequently used by the natives during their corroborees.

Of the wind instruments, the didgeridoo was probably the most common. The use of this large wooden tube, some seven to ten feet long, was taught to the boys at their initiation ceremonies, and was to be found at most social gatherings. Also popular were the small hollow bones and reeds, constructed and used in the same way as pan-pipes.⁶⁶

In some regions, leaf whistles were fashioned by folding a leaf in half, and placing the two halves between the lips. The high pitched sound was produced by gently inhaling through the mouth.

The drum, normally made of tightly rolled opossum skins, was a common percussion instrument. Among some tribes, a split, hollow log, positioned with the convex side up, was employed.

Two boomerangs or sticks were often struck together to establish a rhythm, the resultant sounds being supported by hand-clapping.

In several Queensland tribes, rattles, made by the children from shells or dried seeds, together with bunches of dried leaves, were shaken to produce a sound similar to that made by castanets.⁶⁷

⁶⁵C. Duguid, No Dying Race (London: Angus and Robertson, 1963), p. 132.

⁶⁶Roth, op. cit., pp. 517-520.

⁶⁷Ibid.

It is apparent, that of the childhood pastimes recorded herein, at least four revolve around the sounds and deeds of mythical or supernatural beings. The remaining play activities of the children, and to an extent, those of the adults, are largely imitative of the physical phenomena encountered during their everyday living.

Of their main ceremonial entertainment, Mitchell wrote, "There can be little doubt but that the corrobory is the medium through which the delights of poetry and drama are enjoyed, in a limited degree, even by these primitive savages of New Holland."⁶⁸

A breakdown of games and pastimes of a ceremonial nature and the associated characteristics of each are presented in Table IV. The following abbreviations are used:

C	Chance	I	Imitation
D	Dexterity	P	Pursuit
E	Enigma	S	Strategy
e	Exultation	V	Vertigo

TABLE IV
THE CHARACTERISTICS AND FREQUENCY OF GAMES AND PASTIMES
ASSOCIATED WITH CEREMONIAL RITES

INDIVIDUAL PASTIME	C	D	E	e	I	P	S	V
The bullroarer				x				
GROUP PASTIMES								
Opossum		x			x			x
Spirits					x	x		
Koko					x			

⁶⁸Mitchell, loc. cit.

TABLE IV (continued)

	C	D	E	e	I	P	S	V
Moon					x	x		
Burning skin					x			
"Play about" corroboree				x	x			
The tribal corroboree				x	x			

Total Play Activities of a Ceremonial Nature

Pastimes

Individual - 1

Group - 7

Games

Group - Nil

Team - Nil

Frequency of Predominant Play Characteristics

Imitation - 7

Exultation - 3

Pursuit - 2

Dexterity - 1

Vertigo - 1

Chance - Nil

Enigma - Nil

Strategy - Nil

CHAPTER VI

CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION

All children, irrespective of race or creed, devote a considerable amount of their childhood towards understanding, often quite unconsciously, the physical and material aspects of their existence.

Birth in itself does not guarantee the child a place in society. His youth must first be spent in learning of his fellow creatures and their expectations of him, his physical surroundings, his heredity and his future responsibilities.

Unlike many children who received formal training, the aboriginal youngster derived his knowledge from informal sources. While directions were sometimes given, along with a word of praise or a reprimand as the occasion warranted, his learning was, for the most part, a matter of trial and error.

This task was perhaps made easier by the semi-public atmosphere in which he lived, many would-be questions being answered before they occurred.

His play, and the play of others, enabled him to learn of, and comprehend, certain aspects of his culture. Through the media of drama, art and song, he discovered his history, learned of the supernatural and understood more fully the needs and disappointments of his peers.

The creatures of the bush, upon which his survival depended, were identified, studied and imitated during the course of his play. Similarly, as their presence was realised, and the need to understand

them arose, other aspects of nature were incorporated into his games and pastimes.

Play, then, was one medium through which the aboriginal sought to establish his identity.

I. PASTIMES ASSOCIATED WITH CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION

GROUP PASTIMES

A. Art (Dexterity)

Having no written language, the aborigines employed various pictorial art forms to record their mythological and religious traditions. While the vast majority were cut into rocks, others were painted with pipe-clay, ochre or charcoal onto pieces of bark or rock faces. Many art works were constructed so that they could be easily viewed by a group of observers. This type was used as a medium through which tribal lore and history were conveyed to the younger generation. Often several vertical strokes were made by the artist to represent a whole series of events not depicted in the drawing. The importance of each was explained to the onlookers during the course of the artist's narrative.¹

Unlike the above, other art works simply depicted aspects of the aboriginal's environment. In the Hawksbury River district of New South Wales, a variety of rock carvings have been discovered, portraying various species of animals, birds, reptiles and fish, together with human forms

¹K. L. Parker, Australian Legendary Tales (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 10.



FIGURE 44 PAINTING OF A TOY WHIRLER, QUEENSLAND²

and native implements. More recent additions, including convicts wearing leg-irons, and rabbits, have been discovered in adjacent areas.

In other parts of the continent, similar subjects, painted or drawn with charcoal, have been recorded.³ One such painting, finished in red and white ochre, is shown in Figure 44.

The Victorian natives etched pictures of animals and birds ". . . or anything else that might occur to them,"⁴ into the blackened bark linings of their mia-mias. Plomley records a similar practice by the

²F. D. McCarthy, Australian Aboriginal Rock Art (Sydney: Government Printing Office, 1958), Figure 23.

³H. Basedow, "Notes on the Natives of Bathurst Island, North Australia," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 48:320-321, 1913; and W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:493-495, 1903.

⁴R. B. Smyth, The Aborigines of Victoria: with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other parts of Australia and Tasmania, compiled from various sources for the government of Victoria, Vol. II (Melbourne: Government Printing Office, 1878), p. 299.

Tasmanian women, but recalls that their drawings were "rude".⁵

In most areas, works of art were done by the men and boys. Examples have been found, however, that fail to fit any of the known categories, and may well be attributed to the women and children.

Art depicting natural phenomena was called "Kapan-balkalkal", by the aboriginals of Mount Cook, Queensland, which, when translated, meant "to imitate".⁶

It is interesting to note that certain personal possessions were often ornamented to denote ownership, as were important finds, such as a tree containing honey.⁷

B. Sand Drawings (Dexterity)

The use of sand drawings for instructional purposes has been discussed previously, in connection with the aboriginals' economic pursuits. This pastime, however, went beyond the study and reproduction of animal and bird tracks.

Using small sticks or their fingers, the youngsters sketched a variety of motifs into the sand. Subject matter ranged from simple drawings of trees and human faces to detailed landscape scenes. This type of amusement appeared to be most popular with the native girls, who

⁵N. J. B. Plomley, (ed.), Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829-34 (Kingsgrove, New South Wales: Halstead Press Limited, 1966), p. 563.

⁶Roth, loc. cit.

⁷E. Palmer, "Notes on Some Australian Tribes," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 13:288-289, 1884.

organised, according to Hassell, ". . . many amusing drawing competitions."⁸

The presence of the European has, to some extent, influenced the subject matter of their sketches.⁹ Roth, who several times witnessed natives engaged in this pastime, recorded that they invariably ". . . finish up with a European boot-print, making it 10 to 12 inches in length . . . bursting out laughing at its ludicrous size."¹⁰

Sand drawn graphic signs were commonly employed to supplement verbal communication and to illustrate stories. A portion of such a story, told by an adult to a group of children, is given by Basedow:

'Here is the man,' explains the artist, as he draws a vertical line, 'walking about' (a number of small holes are tapped into the sand), 'he sees a lizard' (a longer line on the slope crossed by two shorter bars at right angles), 'away it runs' (pairs of taps slantingly opposite to each other), 'the man after it' (single taps between the former pairs), 'he throws a boomerang' (the familiar shape of the weapon is outlined), 'the lizard goes down a hole' (a hole is scratched into the ground), 'the Kurdaitcha take it, it is gone!' (he slaps the spot with the flat of his hand) . . .¹¹

An excellent account, by Munn,¹² tells of the place of stories

⁸E. Hassell, "Notes on the ethnology of the Wheelman tribe of Southwestern Australia," Anthropos, D. S. Davidson, editor. 31:696, 1936.

⁹R. M. Berndt, "Some Aboriginal Children's Games," Mankind, No. 9, 2:293, October, 1940.

¹⁰Roth, op. cit., p. 493.

¹¹H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), pp. 70-71.

¹²N. D. Munn, "The Walbiri Sand Story," Australian Territories, No. 6, 3:37-44, 1963.

of this nature, and their associated sand drawings, in a central desert tribe. Within this area, the stories were told mainly by the women. Much more sophisticated and relying, to a greater extent, on sand illustrations, than the story outlined above, they revolved around all aspects of life, as well as tribal mythology. The children of the Walbiri tribe apparently preferred to listen to the stories rather than tell them, and, by the age of seven, were able to understand a story delivered with a minimum of verbal accompaniment.¹³

C. Story Telling (Exultation)

The stories told around the camp-fire at night played an important role in the education of the adolescent. "These tell of their ancestors, of how the world was made and of all the legends and mysteries associated with their culture."¹⁴

In general, most of these stories, although differing between tribes, were well known to the individual tribesmen. It was not unusual for the storyteller to be queried on some aspect and corrected by the gathering, during the course of his tale. If the issue were in doubt, the old men were consulted and the point clarified before the narrator was permitted to resume.¹⁵

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴A. Poignant, Piccaninny walkabout: a story of two Aboriginal children (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1957), p. x.

¹⁵P. Beveridge, "On the Aborigines inhabiting the Great Lacustrine and Riverine Depressions of the Lower Murray, Lower Murrumbidgee, Lower Lachlan and Lower Darling," Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales, 17:20-21, 1883.

A surprisingly large percentage, however, were "nonsense"¹⁶ stories, or related to current events¹⁷ - hunting exploits, domestic problems, anticipated fights, often grossly exaggerated, but told for the pleasure they afforded.

The effect of the tale on the audience lay, not in the plot itself, but in the craft and wit of the narrator. Among some tribes, the narration was delivered by a professional storyteller, who, in many cases, inherited his position.¹⁸ In districts where food was plentiful, and the natives had more leisure time, the men were the chief storytellers, although it was usually a tribal elder, with his more extensive repertoire and skillful gestures, that was first called upon.¹⁹

Some of the central Queensland aboriginal men regarded this pastime as womanish and childish,²⁰ although it was common for them to sit and listen to the tales of the females.

Story telling was thus a medium by which their history was ". . .

¹⁶W. E. Harney, Brimming Billabongs (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1963), p. 47.

¹⁷Smyth, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 179.

¹⁸Roth, op. cit., pp. 485-486; and G. K. Dunbar, "Notes on the Ngemba tribe of the Central Darling River, Western New South Wales," Mankind, No. 5, 3:144-145, December, 1943.

¹⁹Smyth, loc. cit.; Beveridge, loc. cit.; and A. C. Haddon, "The Ethnography of the Western Tribe of Torres Straits," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 19:327-328, 1890.

²⁰Roth, loc. cit.

kept alive, and so handed down from one generation to another; whatever cannot be woven into an entertaining narrative, for tribal amusement during the long nights, is entirely lost and forgotten."²¹

D. Singing (Exultation)

As well as helping to illustrate their corroboree dances, ". . . songs of the men and sound of the didgeridoo . . . would be heard,"²² and enjoyed around the campfire after supper. It was in this setting that past and present adventures were retold through song.

Generally speaking, any native was permitted to "find" a song, and most composed in this way were the result of a dream.²³ In some areas, however, one man, who was often supported by the tribe, arranged and delivered the majority of compositions.²⁴

The subject matter of their songs revolved around ceremonial observances and traditions, every-day tribal and personal interests, deceased persons, obscenity and provocations for quarrels.²⁵

²¹Beveridge, loc. cit.

²²Harney, loc. cit.

²³Roth, op. cit., pp. 513-515.

²⁴K. L. Parker, The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia (London: A. Constable and Company, 1905), p. 132; and T. M. Sutton, "The Adjardurah tribe of Aborigines on Yorke's Peninsula: some of their early customs and traditions," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch, 2:19, 1890.

²⁵N. B. Tindale, "Native Songs of the South-East of South Australia," Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of South Australia, 61:120, 1937; and Roth, loc. cit.

It is interesting to note that the aborigines did not employ this medium to express sympathy, sentiment, pathos, love or joy.²⁶

In many cases, songs, like dances, were treated as articles of exchange, and occasionally selected men were sent to neighbouring tribes to learn their songs.²⁷

The early part of the evening was often devoted to teaching the children the words and meanings of a song.²⁸ In some areas, however, no formal instruction was given, the youngsters learning through participation.²⁹

The children commonly built small fires and conducted their own "sing-songs", singing of spirits and ghosts, bush creatures, daily activities and snatches of adult songs.³⁰

In some instances, these gatherings were attended by an initiated

²⁶Ibid.; and E. H. Davies, "Aboriginal Songs," Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia, 51:83, n. d.

²⁷Roth, loc. cit.; Parker, loc. cit.; and S. D. Porteus, The Psychology of a Primitive People: a study of the Australian Aborigine (London: E. Arnold and Company, 1931), p. 27.

²⁸R. A. Waterman, "Music in Australian Aboriginal culture - some sociological and psychological implications," Music Theraphy, 5:42, 1955; and R. M. Berndt and C. H. Berndt, "A Selection of Children's Songs from Ooldea, Western South Australia," Mankind, No. 9, 4:366, November, 1952.

²⁹R. M. Berndt and C. H. Berndt, The World of the First Australians: An Introduction to the Traditional Life of the Australian Aborigines (London: Angus and Robertson, 1964), p. 133.

³⁰Ibid.; and Porteus, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

male, who suggested and assisted with the songs.³¹

It was common also for teenage boys and girls to meet in the bush during the course of the day, to engage in erotic play and sing songs about ". . . secret subjects which must be kept from adults."³²

A popular pastime at adult gatherings was riddle telling. Brief songs were used to describe the things to be guessed, with the singer acting out the various aspects of the song. Parker gives several examples to indicate the nature of this amusement:

What is it that says, 'You cannot help yourself; you will have to go and let me take your place; you cannot stay when I come?'

Ans. The grey hairs in a man's beard to the black ones.

.
'What is it that goes along the creek, across the creek, underneath it, and along it again, and yet has left neither side?'

Ans. The yellow-flowering creeping water-weed.

.
'You cannot walk without me, yet you grease your body and forget me and let me crack, even though but for me you could neither walk nor run. Who says that?' Ans. A black fellow's feet, which he neglects to grease when doing the rest of his body.³³

Harney reports that the natives of north-east Arnhem Land:

. . . chanted the 'song-maps' of their country. Each part of a mountain, beach, creek, river or spring, was 'sung' into the 'map-chants', and as people heard these songs, they memorized the scenes and landmarks around them as they went their way. The 'songmen' were the oral map makers of the tribes, and the wanderings of the culture heroes were the roads across the land.³⁴

³¹R. M. Berndt and C. H. Berndt, "A Selection of Children's Songs from Ooldea, Western South Australia," Mankind, No. 9, 4:368, 1952.

³²Ibid.

³³Parker, op. cit., pp. 132-133.

³⁴W. E. Harney, Content to Lie in the Sun (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1965), p. 155.

The songs of the aborigines thus occupied an important position in their lives. They were employed both for their enjoyment, and as a means to preserve their legends, sacred myths, law, sanctions, ideals and ways of life.

E. Mimicry (Imitation)

Petrie³⁵ recalls that, as mimics, the natives were exceedingly skillful, frequently amusing each other by imitating the various bush creatures in their natural environment, along with anything else that took their fancy. This ability was apparent to Barrington, who wrote:

. . . the children have a talent for mimicry in which they take great delight; the air of a soldier, the importance of an officer, the sulking way of a lazy convict, indeed, everything that passes, they mimic with great exactness³⁶

Emus and kangaroos proved to be the two creatures most commonly mimicked. In imitation of the emu, the performer bent forward from the hips, and was covered with skins until only his legs protruded. Among the Queensland tribes, the mimic's arm and hand was made to represent the neck and head of the bird, while a small cluster of feathers, held in the other hand, formed the tail,³⁷ as illustrated in Figure 45. The natives of the Kukata tribe,³⁸ however, fashioned the bird's neck and

³⁵C. C. Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Watson, Ferguson and Company, 1904), p. 113.

³⁶G. Barrington, History of New South Wales (London: W. Flint, 1802), p. 21.

³⁷Roth, op. cit., p. 489.

³⁸H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), p. 81.



FIGURE 45 "EMU", QUEENSLAND³⁹

head out of a stick, some three feet in length, with a tuft of feathers tied at its upper end. The performer clasped the stick in both hands and held it erect in front of him. Onto his rear end was fastened a tuss-ock of grass, representing the emu's tail. The performer then moved around, imitating, as closely as possible, the actions and sounds of the bird he represented. ". . . some of the children scamper around him in great excitement, others flee from him shrieking with terror."⁴⁰

³⁹Roth, op. cit., Plate I.

⁴⁰Basedow, loc. cit.

The Tasmanian natives manipulated their fingers and hands to form various animal and bird shapes. To fashion the pelican, ". . . the fore and second fingers are looped while the little one and thumb are extended."⁴¹

Popular also was the practice of imitating the various sounds of the bush creatures.⁴² Porteus⁴³ writes that it was common for the small boys to rival each other at night, with calls such as those made by the owl, plover and dingo.

Human actions, too, appealed to the mimic. Goodale⁴⁴ witnessed aboriginal children on Melville Island imitating mourners at a funeral. The youngsters divided into two groups, one acting the role of the "home" group, and the others, the visitors. An emissary from the "home" group whispered a name to the visitors, then returned to his party. The latter, after waiting for a few minutes, ran wailing and sobbing to throw their arms around the child mentioned. The groups then changed places, and the new "home" group invented a death in their midst. Apparently, the fun lay in deciding who was to "die".

The natives of some Tasmanian tribes selected a branch off a large fern tree, and stripped away the leaves from one side. The

⁴¹Plomley, op. cit., p. 370.

⁴²Basedow, op. cit., p. 70.

⁴³Porteus, loc. cit.

⁴⁴J. C. Goodale, "Sketches of Tiwi Children," Expedition, No. 4, 2:6, 1960.

remaining leaves were named according to the way they moved when the branch was shaken - the movement being identified with the walk of a particular member of the tribe.⁴⁵

In general, the Australian aboriginal displayed remarkable skill in acting out incidents witnessed or experienced, both of a humorous and dramatic nature.⁴⁶

F. March Fly (Imitation)

The children on Queensland's Bloomfield River had a pastime they called "March Fly".⁴⁷ The child, imitating this insect, ran around with his eyes closed, attempting to catch one of the other players. When successful, he made unpleasant noises, imitative of the insect's buzz, in his captive's ear, and gave him a sharp pinch. The latter simulated the sting of the fly.

In some regions of this state, the native children delighted in catching a live March Fly, and, after piercing its body with a piece of grass, allowed it to fly off with its burden.⁴⁸

G. Ant-Lion (Imitation)

Tindale⁴⁹ found this to be a common pastime with the Ngadadjara

⁴⁵Plomley, loc. cit.

⁴⁶L. Havemeyer, The Drama of Savage People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), pp. 225-227.

⁴⁷Roth, op. cit., p. 489.

⁴⁸Petrie, op. cit., p. 114.

⁴⁹N. B. Tindale, "A Game from the Great Western Desert of Australia," Man, No. 145, 38:128-129, August, 1938.

children of Western Australia.

Each child, using his thumb and index finger, took hold of the skin on the back of one of his hands and of one of his friends. A chain of closely linked hands resulted when all players were in position.

The group, moving their hands up and down in unison, sang a short song, several times over. The words of the song, when translated, meant "devil baby home go". The devil baby referred to a species of insect which trapped and devoured ants. This insect was commonly known as the "ant-lion", by these natives.

Tindale remarks on the similarity between this activity and one played by the Papuans, where, after forming the chain of hands, one suddenly broke away, ". . . and then all start pinching each other, like so many ants biting."⁵⁰

The song was also sung by the Ngadadjara children, while playing with the "ant-lion". They apparently took great delight in dropping the insect on to the sand and watching it burrow back into the sanctuary of its pit. The youngsters then placed ants in its pit, and watched the "ant-lion" capture and eat them.

H. Shark (Imitation)

This pastime was enjoyed by the children of Cape Bedford in Queensland.⁵¹ The child acting the part of the shark straightened his

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Roth, loc. cit.



FIGURE 46 SHARK⁵²

arms and crossed them at the elbows in front of his body, as shown in Figure 46. He then chased the other players, endeavouring to catch them between his forearms, while all the time imitating the movement of a shark through water.

I. String Figures (Dexterity, Enigma)

The fashioning of string figures was a pastime common to most Australian aborigines, with the exception of those living on the southwest coast and Tasmania.⁵³ The figures were used by both sexes, young

⁵²Ibid., Plate II.

⁵³F. D. McCarthy, "String Figures of Australia," The Australian Museum Magazine, No. 8, 12:279-283, March, 1958; and D. S. Davidson, "Aboriginal Australian String Figures," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, No. 6, 84:763-901, August, 1941.

and old, to help illustrate their discussions, and as a means of entertainment.⁵⁴

The string used by the women was about three feet in length, while that used by the men was slightly longer. Made of bark-fibre, it was commonly worn by the women as a necklet.⁵⁵

In some areas, the string had a socio-magical significance. It was believed, for example, that if a man burnt a woman's string, she would go blind, or die from dysentery. If, however, a woman passed a string on to a man, she was suggesting intercourse. The men commonly used it as a love charm, either for illicit purposes, or to secure a wife.⁵⁶

In general, the majority of men were unable to manipulate the string as well as the women, and could remember fewer designs.⁵⁷ The women, however, were exceedingly skillful. McCarthy⁵⁸ witnessed one woman employ 181 different manipulations, (Figure 47) to fashion 202 different figures.

⁵⁴Roth, op. cit., pp. 490-493; and C. P. Mountford, "String figures of the Adnyamatana tribe," Mankind, No. 5, 4:183-189, September, 1950.

⁵⁵McCarthy, loc. cit.

⁵⁶F. D. McCarthy, "The String Figures of Yirrkalla," Records of the American - Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, C. P. Mountford, editor. 2:415-511, 1960.

⁵⁷Ibid.; Davidson, loc. cit.; and Roth, loc. cit.

⁵⁸F. D. McCarthy, "String Figures of Australia," The Australian Museum Magazine, No. 8, 12:279-283, March, 1958.

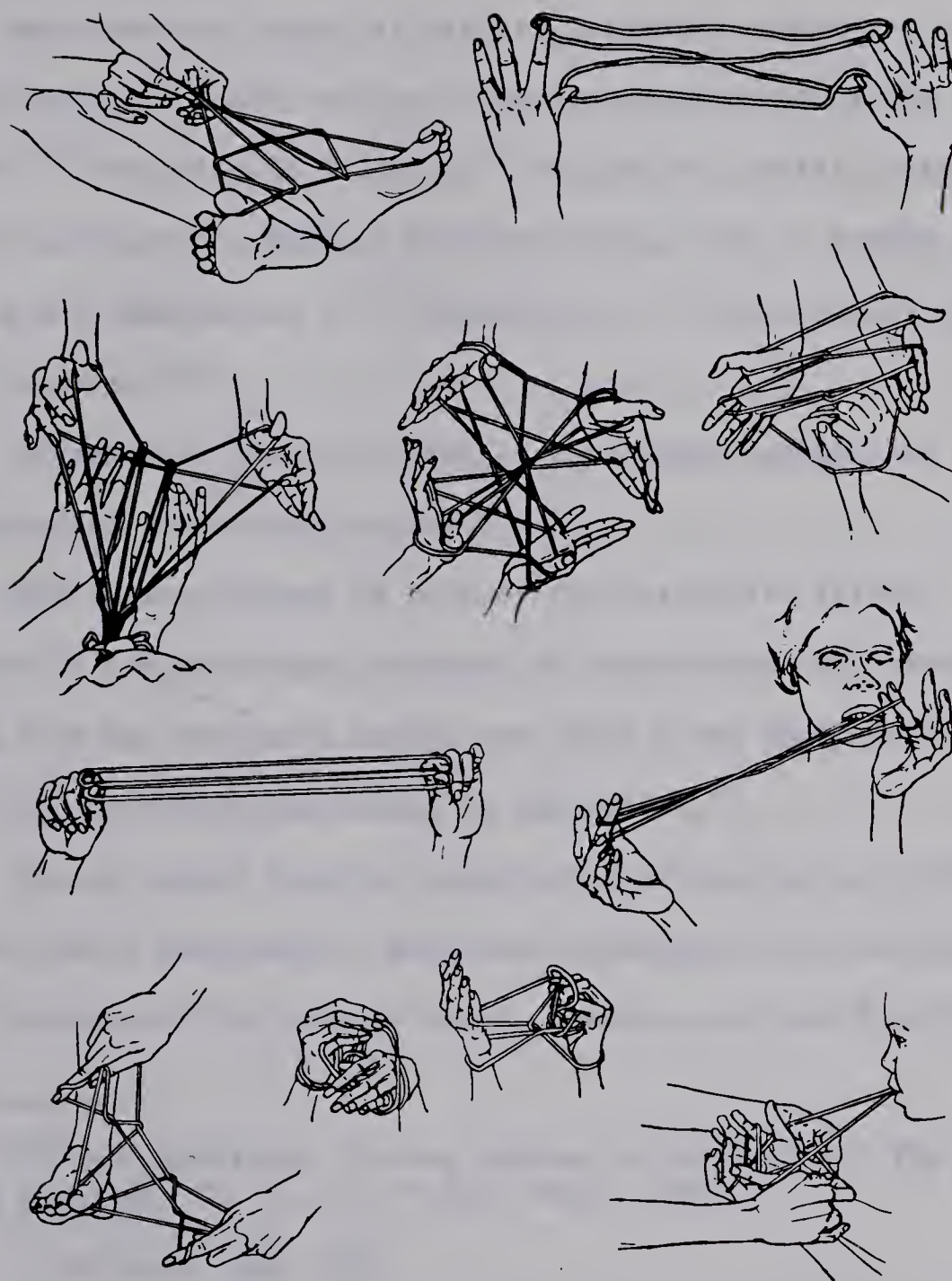


FIGURE 47
VARIOUS MANIPULATIONS EMPLOYED IN THE MAKING OF STRING FIGURES⁵⁹

⁵⁹F. D. McCarthy, "The String Figures of Yirrkalla," Records of the American - Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, C. P. Mountford, editor. Vol. II, 1960, Figure 5.

The figures, generally revolving around the women's sphere of life, depicted such things as plants, wildlife, implements, ornaments, living quarters, human actions, weapons and features of the landscape and sky.⁶⁰ According to Davidson,⁶¹ few had any social, totemic or magical connotation, however McCarthy states that in Arnhem Land ". . . most of the figures are . . . displayed . . . for a ritual, magical or social purpose."⁶²

Distinction should be made at this point between cat's cradle, string tricks and string figures.

The former, played by some of the Australian tribes,⁶³ involved a series of simple designs executed by two persons. One removed the string from her partner's hands, and, with a few manipulations, changed it into the following design in the series.⁶⁴

String tricks involved complicated arrangements or knots that ran out freely when pulled. Only six different tricks have been recorded in Australia.⁶⁵ All six of these, however, are found in other areas of

⁶⁰F. D. McCarthy, "String Figures of Australia," The Australian Museum Magazine, No. 8, 12:279-283, March, 1958.

⁶¹Davidson, loc. cit.

⁶²McCarthy, loc. cit.

⁶³Petrie, op. cit., p. 111; and W. A. Cawthorne, "Rough Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Natives," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch, 27:60, 1927.

⁶⁴Davidson, loc. cit.

⁶⁵Ibid.

the world.

The simplest type of string figures found among the Australian natives required only one or two manipulations of the loop around the fingers. The loop was then placed on the lap, or on the ground, and folded into position.⁶⁶ Figure 48 illustrates a coconut palm made in this manner. Designs of this type were very realistic, and, it is interesting to note, have not been found anywhere else in the world.⁶⁷

The largest group of string figures required between six to ten manipulations, however, several required as many as fifty-four before they were completed.⁶⁸

If the figures were extremely difficult, up to four people worked on it, using their teeth, necks, fingers, wrists, elbows, knees and toes.⁶⁹ Occasionally, more than one piece of string was employed.⁷⁰

Most of these figures were of a mesh type, assuming a fixed character upon completion, as depicted in Figure 49. As they did not resemble their motifs in many cases, the various parts were named to

⁶⁶Roth, loc. cit.

⁶⁷McCarthy, loc. cit.

⁶⁸F. D. McCarthy, "The String Figures of Yirrkalla," Records of the American - Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, C. P. Mountford, editor. 2:415-511, 1960.

⁶⁹Basedow, op. cit., p. 84; Roth, loc. cit.; and F. D. McCarthy, "String Figures of Australia," The Australian Museum Magazine, No. 8, 12:279-283, March, 1958.

⁷⁰Ibid.; Roth, loc. cit.; and Basedow, loc. cit.

clarify the figure.⁷¹

Only a few action figures have been found in Australia. Of these, there appeared to be two types. In the first, the action could be contin-



FIGURE 48 FOLDED STRING FIGURE - COCONUT PALM⁷²

ued indefinitely. This can be visualised by viewing Figure 50, where the hands and foot were made to move rhythmically. With the other type, the action led to a definite termination of the figure,⁷³ as shown in Figures 51 and 52.

Occasionally, a series of string figures was made consecutively

⁷¹F. D. McCarthy, "String Figures of Australia," The Australian Museum Magazine, No. 8, 12:279-283, March, 1958.

⁷²F. D. McCarthy, "The String Figures of Yirrkalla," Records of the American - Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, C. P. Mountford, editor. Vol. II, 1960, Figure 140.

⁷³Davidson, loc. cit.

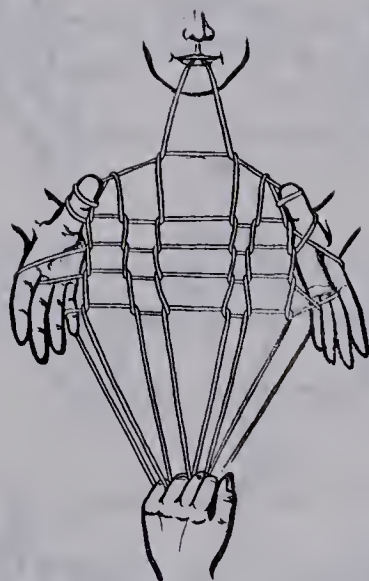


FIGURE 49 STATIC MESH
- TURTLE⁷⁴

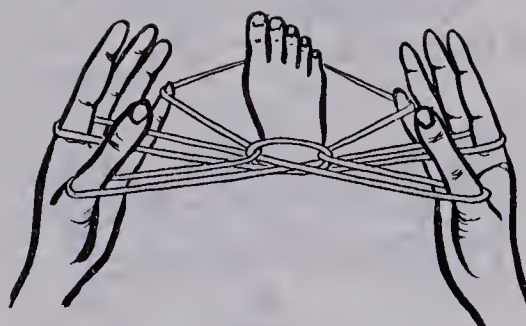


FIGURE 50 CONTINUOUS ACTION
- VULVA⁷⁵

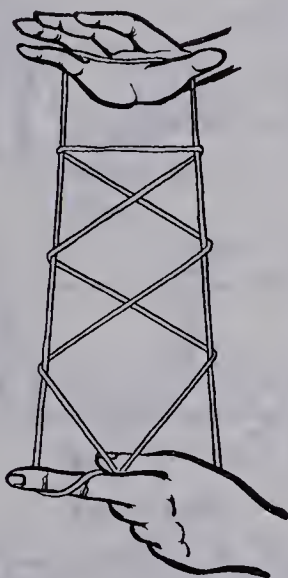


FIGURE 51 TERMINATED ACTION
- A STEP IN "BABY BEING BORN"⁷⁶



FIGURE 52 TERMINATED ACTION
- BABY BEING BORN⁷⁷

⁷⁴Ibid., Figure 51.

⁷⁵Ibid., Figure 41.

⁷⁶Ibid., Figure 18.

⁷⁷Ibid., Figure 19.

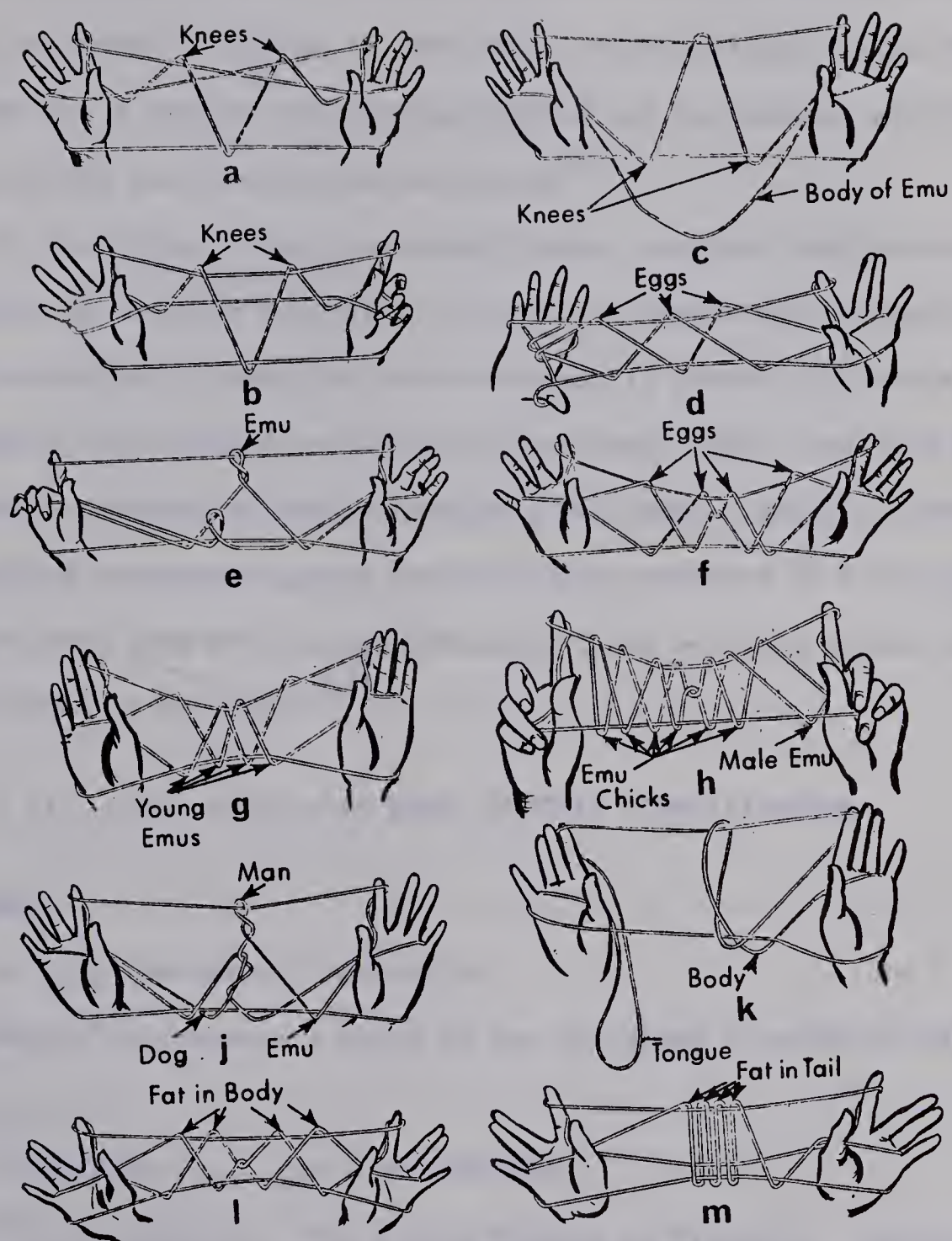


FIGURE 53 THE EMU STORY

(a) Emu making nest. (b) Emu laying eggs. (c) Emu sitting on eggs. (d) Emu eggs. (e) Emu standing up in fright. (f) Nest of eggs left by frightened emu. (g) Young chicks leaving nest. (h) Chicks being taken for a walk by male emu. (j) Men and dogs chase emu. (k) The dead emu. (l) Fat in the body of the emu. (m) Fat in the tail of the emu.⁷⁸

⁷⁸Mountford, *op. cit.*, Plate K.

to help illustrate a story. One such series, involving twelve different figures, is shown in Figure 53. The story associated with these figures described how a nesting emu, having hatched out her chicks, was finally caught, killed and dismembered for eating.⁷⁹

An Australian survey of string figures revealed that sixty-eight originated in northern Australia, fourteen in north-west Australia, seven in south-west Australia, seventy-eight in central Australia, two in Victoria, two hundred and five in Queensland, while none have been recorded in Tasmania or New South Wales. This made a total of just over four hundred different figures for the whole continent.⁸⁰ It is interesting to note that this is approximately forty per cent of the string figures found in the world.⁸¹

II. GAMES ASSOCIATED WITH CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION

GROUP GAMES

A. Emu (Imitation, Dexterity)

Dawson⁸² witnessed a group of men imitating a hunter stalking an

⁷⁹Mountford, op. cit., pp. 183-189.

⁸⁰F. D. McCarthy, "The String Figures of Yirrkalla," Records of the American - Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, C. P. Mountford, editor. 2:422, 1960.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²J. Dawson, Australian Aborigines: the language and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the Western district of Victoria, Australia (Melbourne: G. Robertson, 1881), p. 84.

emu.

One man, holding a stick with a feather tied at its top, stood in the centre of a cleared space. The others, in turn, stalked the bird, each attempting to make his actions more realistic than the one before. The mimic, carrying a shield and boomerang, ". . . moves round the circle for fifteen or twenty minutes with his eye upon the feather, now crouching, and then running . . . and finishes by stooping and touching the feather."⁸³

The tribal elders judged the performers on the basis of their acting ability, and presented the best actor with the feather. The victor was then again required to repeat his movements around the feather for the pleasure of the gathering. After he had done this, he presented each of the other competitors with the feather, to remove any feelings of jealousy.

B. Crocodile (Dexterity, Imitation)

This game was played by the aborigines along the Bloomfield River and around Princess Charlotte Bay.⁸⁴ Each player, in turn, swam as far as possible under water, blowing bubbles as he moved. The bubbles were intended to represent a crocodile's tracks. This was essentially an endurance event, as each participant attempted to better his previous opponent's mark.

C. Lightning (Chance, Imitation)

At Cape Bedford in Queensland, a game called Lightning was

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Roth, op. cit., p. 489.



FIGURE 54 THE LIGHTNING GAME⁸⁵

popular with the small girls.⁸⁶ Two children stood several feet apart, facing each other, with an endless string around their necks. Each child placed a small stick between the string, and began to turn it in the opposite direction to her partner until the string was twisted tightly, as illustrated in Figure 54.

On a given signal, the hands were removed from the sticks and the girls pressed backwards with their necks, exerting pressure on the string. This caused the string to unwind rapidly, and the sticks to be fired amongst their surrounding playmates. The children hit by the sticks were said to be struck by lightning.

⁸⁵Ibid., Plate XIII.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 493.

D. Memory Training (Enigma)

A game which helped the children to remember and identify the surrounding topography was played by the Walbri tribe of the Northern Territory.⁸⁷

A large circle was drawn on the ground and around it were placed sticks and stones, each item representing a prominent landmark in the area. Often as many as fifty objects were placed around the circle at one time. After studying the arrangement of the objects, the players turned their backs on the circle:

The first player calls an object at a given point and continues to call each article on the line, until he, or she, calls wrongly, then another player takes up the call. When all fail, they go away once more while the 'head' rearranges the pieces for the next game.⁸⁸

The first child to call all the objects correctly had the honour of arranging the pieces in readiness for the new game.

The games and pastimes discussed in this chapter tended to be of an imitative nature. Activities of this type, to a certain extent, helped the native understand, more fully, the culture into which he was born. He learned of his heritage from his fine arts, and of natural phenomena, from his other play activities.

Interestingly enough, all these activities required group participation. None was an individual pastime or team event, perhaps indicating

⁸⁷W. E. Harney, "Sport and play amidst the Aborigines of the Northern Territory," Mankind, No. 9, 4:378-379, November, 1952.

⁸⁸Ibid.

that in a society such as this, cooperation was more important than competition.

A breakdown of games and pastimes of cultural identification and the associated characteristics of each are presented in Table V.

The following abbreviations are used:

C	Chance	I	Imitation
D	Dexterity	P	Pursuit
E	Enigma	S	Strategy
e	Exultation	V	Vertigo

TABLE V
THE CHARACTERISTICS AND FREQUENCY OF GAMES AND PASTIMES
ASSOCIATED WITH CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION

GROUP PASTIMES	C	D	E	e	I	P	S	V
Art		x						
Sand drawings		x						
Story telling				x				
Singing				x				
Mimicry					x			
March fly					x			
Ant-lion					x			
Shark					x			
String figures		x	x					
GROUP GAMES								
Emu		x			x			
Crocodile		x			x			
Lightning	x				x			
Memory training			x					

Total Play Activities Associated with Cultural Identification

Pastimes
Individual - Nil
Group - 9

TABLE V (continued)

Games	
Group	- 4
Team	- Nil

Frequency of Predominant Play Characteristics

Imitation	- 7
Dexterity	- 5
Enigma	- 2
Exultation	- 2
Chance	- 1
Pursuit	- Nil
Strategy	- Nil
Vertigo	- Nil

CHAPTER VII

SOCIAL INTERACTION

The games and pastimes discussed in this chapter appear to have been played solely for the pleasure they afforded.

Play of this nature enabled the native to enjoy an atmosphere different to that of the mundane daily tasks necessary to ensure his survival. Adults and children alike were able to temporarily disregard personal and communal problems, by indulging in friendly competitive and non-competitive play activities. Generally, these activities were such that all members of the tribe were able to participate, thus permitting maximum social intercourse.

Unlike the forms of play discussed elsewhere, those outlined here had little carry-over value with respect to the aboriginal's day to day commitments. Their major attribute was, perhaps, to help the player understand the meaning of cooperation, a characteristic vital in other aspects of life.

It is interesting to note that the implements of play used in these games and pastimes were, for the most part, manufactured specifically for the activity in question.

I. PASTIMES ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL INTERACTION

GROUP PASTIMES

A. Swinging (Vertigo)

A popular pastime with the native children of north-eastern

Queensland was that of swinging on the lawyer-cane vine.¹ This hanging creeper, found in the semi-tropical forests of the region, was cut off two and one-half to three feet from the ground. The youngsters then ran and jumped onto the vine to gain their initial momentum, or, having secured a firm grip on the creeper with both hands and feet, had their playmates push them.

Haddon² records a similar pastime among the children of the Torres Strait Islands. In this region, the aerial roots of the banyan tree were used as a swing.

The aborigines of the Euahlayi tribe chose a low overhanging branch of a tree as their swing.³ As many players as possible straddled it, each holding onto a higher branch. Together, they moved up and down, attempting to gain as much spring out of the branch as possible. Both the children and the adults enjoyed this activity.

Berndt,⁴ studying the natives of south-western South Australia, found the small boys playing upon a "hobby horse", shaped to resemble an emu. As Figure 55 illustrates, it was constructed from a young tree,

¹W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:487-488, 1903.

²A. C. Haddon, (ed.), Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, 4:312, 1912.

³K. L. Parker, The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia (London: A. Constable and Company, 1905), p. 129.

⁴R. M. Berndt, "Some Aboriginal Children's Games," Mankind, No. 9, 2:293, October, 1940.

strong enough to support the child's weight, yet supple enough to sway. All the projecting branches were removed, with the exception of a large one representing the neck and a smaller one used as a handle. Fresh



FIGURE 55 "HOBBY HORSE", SOUTH AUSTRALIA⁵

branches were left at the "emu's" tail and a pad of leaves was placed behind the handle to serve as a seat. The ground beneath was covered with leaves to break any falls should they occur.

B. Skipping (Dexterity)

Skipping was enjoyed by both the aboriginal children and the adults. Among the Queensland tribes, a long root from the white gum, or a vine, was employed as a skipping rope.⁶ The rope was held by a player at each end, and swung backwards and forwards like a pendulum.

⁵Ibid., Figure I.

⁶Roth, op. cit., p. 488; and H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), p. 83.

The other participants jumped over the vine as it passed beneath them.

Petrie⁷ recalls that the natives around Brisbane spent much of their time skipping on the hard sand of the beach. In this area, the vine was circled, and often two players skipped together. Apparently the natives took great delight in attempting to upset the person skipping, by increasing the speed of the vine's revolutions.

In southern New South Wales and Victoria, a skipping rope, often over twenty feet in length and made of loosely twisted duck net, was swung by two men. Players of each sex ran in, one at a time, ". . . until there will be as many as a dozen skipping away at once."⁸ As the participants became tired, they jumped aside, allowing others to take their places.

In the Euahlayi tribe of the Murray River, it was the old men who enjoyed this pastime. The player, after skipping in the normal fashion for a few rounds, began to vary his style. Some of the variations consisted of:

. . . his taking thorns out of his feet, digging as if for larvae of ants, digging yams, grinding grass-seed, jumping like a frog, doing a sort of cobbler's dance, striking an attitude as if looking for something in the distance, running out, snatching up a child, and skipping with it in his arms, or lying flat down on the ground, measuring his full length in that position, rising

⁷C. C. Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Watson, Ferguson and Company, 1904), pp. 110-111.

⁸P. Beveridge, "On the Aborigines inhabiting the Great Lacustrine and Riverine Depression of the Lower Murray, Lower Murrumbidgee, Lower Lachlan and Lower Darling," Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales, 17:54-55, 1883.

and letting the rope slip under him⁹

The rope was swung continually during the course of these antics.

Haddon¹⁰ refers to skipping as being one of the indigenous pastimes of the Murray Islanders. In this area, it was enjoyed only by the children, who used a rope rather than a vine.

C. Splashing (Exultation)

Children and adults, when playing in the water, took great delight in "bombing" each other. An individual, standing on the shore, threw himself into the water as close as possible to a swimmer, attempting to create a large splash and thus swamp the unfortunate person. The women, recalls Petrie,¹¹ usually jump feet foremost, with their knees bent and their ankles gripped.

Along the Cambridge Gulf, the boys carried each other pick-a-back through the shallow water. The carrier then threw his rider backwards into the water, or, if he chose, into the soft mud.¹²

D. Mud Sliding (Vertigo)

This was a popular pastime with both the children and adults who lived near the water. Coming upon a moist clay or salt pan,¹³ they

⁹Parker, op. cit., p. 127.

¹⁰Haddon, loc. cit.

¹¹Petrie, op. cit., p. 111.

¹²Basedow, op. cit., p. 74.

¹³C. Duguid, No Dying Race (London: Angus and Robertson, 1963), p. 92.

"skated" across, sliding on its slippery surface and ". . . laughing at every mishap."¹⁴

The north coast native children utilised the mud banks of the tidal rivers in a similar fashion. In order to gain speed, they took a long run across the firm ground, then, using their arms for balance, attempted to slide on their feet over the slimy surface to the water's edge. In some instances, they joined hands to form a chain before starting their run.¹⁵

The children often varied their style by sliding on their sterns or stomachs, down the bank and into the water.¹⁶

On the Cambridge Gulf, the girls developed yet another technique of mud sliding:

One lies flat on the mud, face downwards, whilst another stands behind her. The one lying now places her arms forward and holds the palms of her hands together; at the same time she bends her legs to a rectangle in the knees, and keeping them together she holds them rigid in that position. Now the girl standing behind seizes the legs of the one on the mud at about the ankles and pushes the human sleigh along the 'slide'.¹⁷

The very small children were occasionally permitted to sit on the back of the girl who was sliding.

In several areas of Queensland, the boys used a piece of bark, much like a small surfboard, to slide along the mud banks. Sometimes

¹⁴Roth, loc. cit.

¹⁵Basedow, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁷Ibid.

the child sat on it, and propelled himself along with his foot.¹⁸ It was more common, however, for the youngsters to ". . . rest on it with

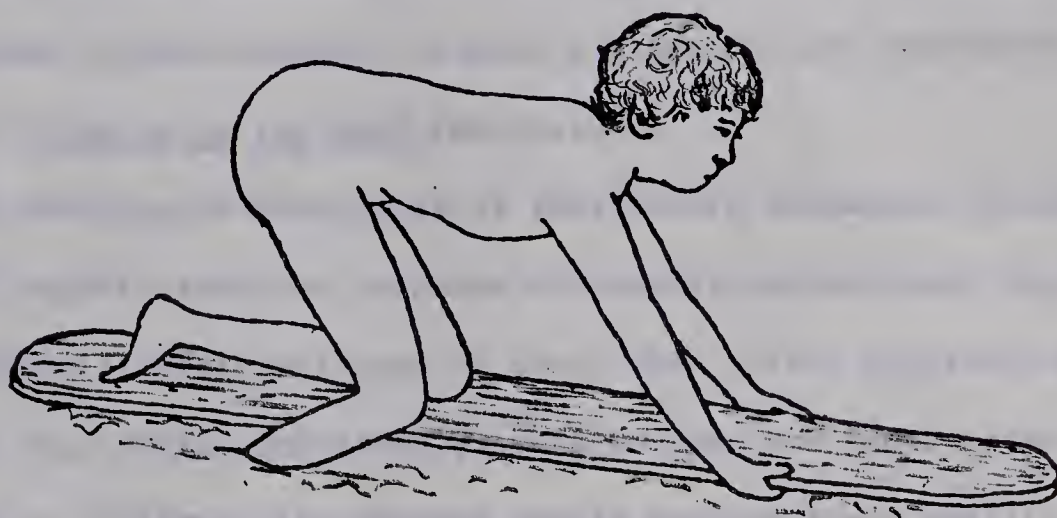


FIGURE 56 MUD SLIDING, QUEENSLAND¹⁹

the left knee and shin, and balance themselves in front by holding on tight with both hands,"²⁰ as illustrated in Figure 56. By repeatedly kicking backwards into the mud with the right leg, they were able to skim along at comparatively high speeds.

E. Tobogganing (Vertigo)

The native children at Kurrekapinnya Soakage, in the Ayers Ranges, used an inclining slope of a large granitic outcrop as a toboggan run. The youngsters gathered bundles of rushes and carried them to the top

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Roth, op. cit., Plate I.

²⁰Ibid., p. 488.

of the slope. They then sat on their "toboggans" and slid down the incline and out onto the sand at its base.²¹ According to Basedow, "the same track has been in use for so long that the 'slide' has become remarkably smooth from constant wear."²²

Many coastal children used the sand-hills in a similar way, sliding down on their bodies, or with a piece of bark underneath them.

F. Playing in the Sand (Exultation)

In addition to activities of this nature discussed elsewhere, Basedow²³ reports that the children of central and northern Australia frequently built small hillocks of sand, then, after positioning themselves on top, defied the other players to come and topple them.

These children also enjoyed partly burying their smaller playmates in holes in the sand. "When the buried ones presently throw the sand from their bodies, the rest of the players scamper off . . . and tell their elders the . . . (devil-devil) is coming."²⁴ It could be surmised that the "devil-devils" were perhaps seeking revenge.

G. "Fireworks" (Exultation)

The aborigines of the Northern Territory, while sitting around

²¹H. Basedow, "Journal of the Government North-west Expedition," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch, 15:206, 1914.

²²H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), p. 75.

²³Ibid., p. 73.

²⁴Ibid.

the fire at night, occasionally cut a disc-shaped piece of bark from a gum tree and placed it in the fire. While still blazing, it was shot into the air, by one of the natives striking it sharply with a stout piece of wood. These people likened the path of this fiery disc-wheel through the night to the movements of the sun.²⁵

In the same region, old spears were set alight and thrown high into the air, for the amusement of the children.²⁶

The Tasmanians had a similar pastime, for, according to Plomley, "the natives amused themselves in sticking spears in trees with the ends burning"²⁷

On dark nights, the east coast aboriginals sometimes lit one or both ends of a returning boomerang and threw it into the air.²⁸ Of such a display, Duncan-Kemp wrote:

. . . four of these 'come-back' boomerangs (tips glowing with fire and thrown at various heights by one thrower - an expert) passing each other above and below in circular flight yet never colliding. Tips a glow like rubies yet never burst into flame.²⁹

²⁵W. E. Harney, "Sport and play amidst the Aborigines of the Northern Territory," Mankind, No. 9, 4:379, November, 1952.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷N. J. B. Plomley, (ed.), Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829-34 (Kingsgrove, New South Wales: Halstead Press Limited, 1966), p. 194.

²⁸J. Dawson, Australian Aborigines: the languages and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the Western district of Victoria, Australia (Melbourne: G. Robertson, 1881), p. 85.

²⁹H. M. Duncan-Kemp, Where Strange Paths Go Down (Brisbane: Smith and Paterson Limited, 1964), pp. 94-95.

In Tasmania, displays of this nature were apparently accompanied by loud noises. Large fern leaf stalks, after being heated, were stuck into the ground, whereupon they exploded with a bang.³⁰

H. Miniature "Kaili"(Dexterity)

The Brisbane natives fashioned a toy, thrown by the thumb and first finger, which described a circle and returned to its owner, in a manner similar to that of the returning boomerang.³¹

Measuring about six to seven inches in length, and one and one-half inches wide, it was cut from the bark of a fig-leaf box tree. The piece of bark, after being rounded at both ends, was heated in ashes and bent into a half circle. This shape was retained by the bark on cooling.

Apparently these toys could only be made during a certain season of the year when the tree's sap had risen, thus permitting the bark to be easily removed.

The men of King Sound amused their children with a similar implement, except that it was only an inch in length and practically straight. This small toy was held between the second and third phalanges of the left index finger, so that about one half of its length projected above the hand. The right index finger, pressing against the nail of the left thumb, was made to strike the projecting part of the toy. "The little slab of wood is jerked into the air, whirls through space in a

³⁰Plomley, op. cit., p. 370.

³¹Petrie, op. cit., p. 110.

parabolic curve, and, when well managed, returns to the hand of the projector."³²

Apparently the children rarely succeeded in making the toy return, and only a few of the men could do it continually.

Lumholtz³³ witnessed several Queensland natives playing with another type of returning toy. Folding the leaf of a palm tree into a square, they gave ". . . the two corners a little twist, one to each side" ³⁴ When thrown into the air, the toy circled and returned to the thrower.

II. GAMES ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL INTERACTION

GROUP GAMES

A. Smoke Spirals (Dexterity)

This game, popular with many of the eastern tribes, was played in the evening around the campfire. The fire was built up and fed with leafy branches until dense smoke began to rise.³⁵ The competitors threw small objects - leaves, pieces of bark or small mussel shells, into the

³²H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), p. 82.

³³C. Lumholtz, Among cannibals: an account of four years' travels in Australia and of camp life with the Aborigines of Queensland (London: John Murray, 1889), p. 52.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 9; and Parker, op. cit., p. 129.



FIGURE 57

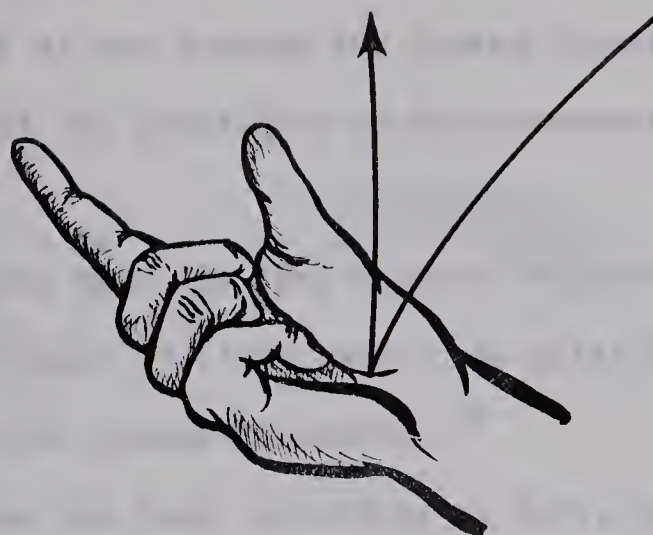


FIGURE 58

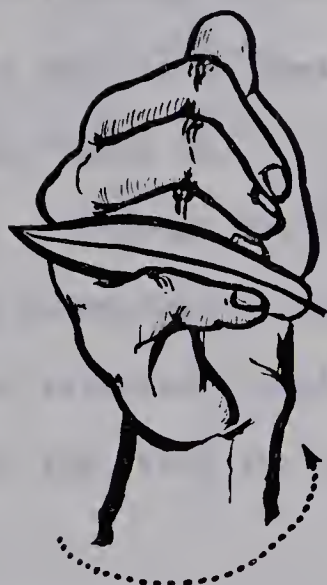


FIGURE 59



FIGURE 60

TECHNIQUES OF LEAF CASTING, CENTRAL QUEENSLAND³⁶

hot current of air above the fire, ". . . where, spinning with increased velocity, they climbed up and up in a beautiful spiral until they lost the influence of the draft and fluttered dejectedly down to mother

³⁶Ibid., Plate I.

earth again."³⁷

Some of the central Queensland natives cast the leaf by rotating the wrist outwards at the same time as the forearm was jerked forwards and down.³⁸ The leaf was released at the completion of this movement, as shown in Figures 57 and 58.

Players of the Kalkadoon tribe held the leaf between the fourth and fifth fingers of the hand, as Figure 59 illustrates, the wrist being rotated inwards as the forearm was snapped downwards.³⁹

The easiest method of casting the leaf, according to Roth, was ". . . to make the firmly-extended forefinger of the one hand act as a sort of spring on the other . . . the leaf, at the moment of release, being shot at an angle into the smoke."⁴⁰ This technique is illustrated in Figure 60.

Although Roth⁴¹ does not state the type of leaf used by the central Queensland natives, players from the Euahlayi tribe on the Murray River selected a coolabah leaf, which was bent slightly after warming it in the fire. The natives of this tribe ". . . placed it on two

³⁷F. B. C. Ford, "The Leaf Boomerang of the Belyando Tribe," Queensland Geographical Journal, 26/27:117, 1910-1912.

³⁸Roth, loc. cit.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

fingers and hit it with one into . . . the current of air."⁴²

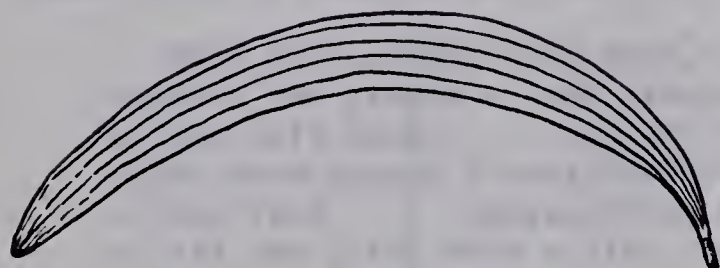


FIGURE 61

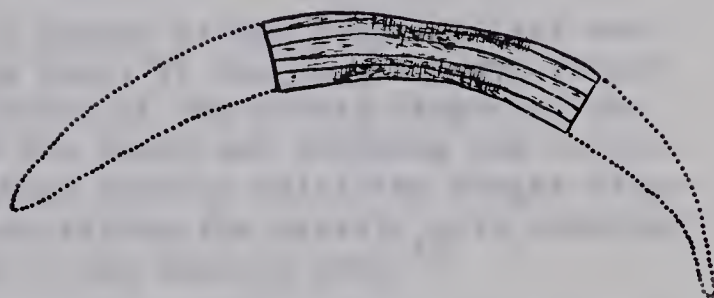


FIGURE 62



FIGURE 63

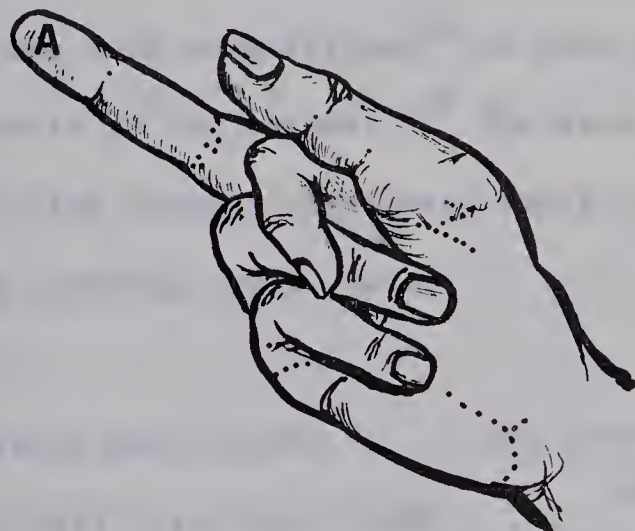


FIGURE 64

LEAF BOOMERANG AND METHOD OF CASTING, BELYANDO TRIBE⁴³

In regions where the brigalow tree grew, the natives selected one of its moderately curved leaves,⁴⁴ depicted in Figure 61. After

⁴²Parker, loc. cit.

⁴³Ford, op. cit., Figures 1-4.

⁴⁴Lumholtz, loc. cit.; and Ford, op. cit., pp. 116-121.

heating it over a flame, the leaf was breathed upon and the middle section pinched laterally until it became concave. The ends were then broken off, however care was taken to ensure that the break was made away from the concave portion of the leaf, as shown in Figure 62.

With the concave side down, a corner of the prepared leaf was held in the crease of the middle joint of the hooked index finger of the left hand . . . and the point of the middle finger of the right hand placed almost behind the joint and touching the corner of the leaf . . . pressure was then exerted until the finger slipped off the joint with a flip, projecting the missile with considerable force and communicating to it the desired spin.⁴⁵

The technique of holding and projecting the toy to the left is shown in Figures 63 and 64. To cast it to the right, the left hand was pointed downwards.

Rivalry became very keen during such competitions⁴⁶ as each player ". . . anxiously watched whose would go the highest."⁴⁷ The game did not terminate after one throw, but often lasted for several hours, with the players continually casting and catching their leaves.

B. Top Spinning (Dexterity)

Basedow remarked that the native Australians ". . . are fond of spinning any suitable objects which fall into their hands"⁴⁸ Small pebbles, nuts, shells and fruits,⁴⁹ together with the larger

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 118-119.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Parker, loc. cit.

⁴⁸Basedow, op. cit., p. 83.

⁴⁹Ibid.; and Haddon, op. cit., p. 314.

manufactured tops, were spun on any level surface by both the children and the adults.



FIGURE 65
BEAN TOP, TORRES STRAIT



FIGURE 66
PEWER TOP, TORRES STRAIT⁵⁰

A small teetotum was manufactured, in many areas, from a large seed, pierced with a sharp twig.⁵¹ Figure 65 illustrates a top of this nature, some five and one-half inches in length and one and one-half inches in diameter, from the Torres Strait. It was made from a flat Queensland bean, perforated with a thin stick. A similar toy, found in the same area, and made from a fruit of the pewer,⁵² is shown in Figure

⁵⁰Ibid., Figure 261.

⁵¹F. D. McCarthy, "Aborigines: Games and Pastimes," The Australian Encyclopaedia (Sydney: Halstead Press, 1958), I, 37; D. F. Thomson, "Childhood and Play Among the Australian Aborigines," Melbourne Age, September 3, 1955; and W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:510, 1903.

⁵²Haddon, op. cit., p. 314.

66. Measuring approximately one inch in diameter and four and one-half inches in length, it was spun, like the other tops of this nature, between the thumb and middle finger.

The aborigines of Cape Bedford in Queensland passed a small wooden splinter through a flattened disc of beeswax, to fashion their small tops. This teetotum, depicted in Figure 67, was spun in the same manner as the previously discussed seed-tops.⁵³

In several Queensland areas, the natives selected a gourd, approximately three inches in diameter, and burnt a small hole, with a fire-stick, through both the top and bottom. A spindle, some three to eight inched long, was then passed through the holes and secured by means of black or yellow eucalypt gum, clay and beeswax, or twine and beeswax. The top, spun between the palms of the hands, was, in some tribes, used only by the men,⁵⁴ however, in the Cairns district, any member of the tribe was permitted to play with it.⁵⁵ To prevent the gourd from fracturing, the players often spun it on a piece of bark-cloth.⁵⁶

This type of top is shown in Figure 68. The small hole seen in the side, caused this top to hum while spinning. This was a recent

⁵³Roth, *loc. cit.*; and K. Kennedy, "An Aboriginal spinning top," North Queensland Naturalist, No. 98, 19:1, September, 1951.

⁵⁴Roth, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁵R. Etheridge, "The game of teetotum as practised by certain of the Queensland Aborigines," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 25:260, 1896.

⁵⁶Ibid.; and Kennedy, *loc. cit.*



FIGURE 67 BEESWAX TOP, CAPE BEDFORD



FIGURE 68 GOURD TOP, QUEENSLAND

Photograph: Courtesy of The Australian Museum

innovation, and was possibly of European origin.⁵⁷

The Cooper Creek aboriginals moulded clay tops around small wooden pegs. These, too, were spun between the palms of the hands.⁵⁸

The natives living in the vicinity of Lake Eyre, central Australia, rolled burnt gypsum, mixed with water, into a ball, inserted a thin peg of wood and allowed it to dry. They spun these small tops between their fingers.⁵⁹

Perhaps the most elaborate tops were found on the Murray Islands of the Torres Strait.⁶⁰ The body of these tops was carved out of stone, and sometimes weighed as much as four pounds.⁶¹ Between four to nine inches in diameter and one and one-half to two inches thick, they were flat on the upper surface and had a convex under surface. A hole drilled through the centre permitted a spindle, six to eighteen inches long, to be wedged into position.⁶² The half inch of stick protruding beneath the top was painted a dull red,⁶³ while the flat upper surface was

⁵⁷Ibid.; and Roth, loc. cit.

⁵⁸Basedow, loc. cit.; and McCarthy, loc. cit.

⁵⁹Kennedy, loc. cit.

⁶⁰Etheridge, op. cit., p. 261.

⁶¹Haddon, op. cit., p. 315.

⁶²Ibid.; and W. H. MacFarlane, "The Stone-Top Spinners of Torres Strait," Walkabout, 2:46, January 1, 1937.

⁶³C. H. Read, "Stone Spinning Tops from Torres Strait, New Guinea," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 17:85, 1887.

decorated with a variety of motifs.

A well-made top was valued to the extent that it was carried to and from tournaments in a special round basket, and was often passed on from one generation to the next.⁶⁴

Competitions, in which the women and children sometimes participated,⁶⁵ often lasted for several days and occasionally featured matches between selected players from various parts of the island.⁶⁶

While the onlookers sang special "top songs", the competitors, balancing their toys on pieces of melon skin,⁶⁷ started them spinning. "Slowly at first the hands work up and down the spindle, then more rapidly until . . . the top is revolving steadily."⁶⁸ MacFarlane,⁶⁹ timing these toys, found some of them to spin for as long as thirty-five minutes.

Several types of peg tops were also found in the Torres Strait Islands. These small toys, spun with a piece of string, bore a striking resemblance to some of the South-east Asian and European tops, and were, in all probability, introduced to the area.

Read remarks that the natives of the Torres Strait did not use

⁶⁴MacFarlane, loc. cit.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 45.

⁶⁶Haddon, op. cit., pp. 315-316.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸MacFarlane, op. cit., p. 47.

⁶⁹Ibid.

tops ". . . as a means of gambling, nor were they employed in any other special manner."⁷⁰

C. Spin Ball (Dexterity)

In the western districts of Queensland, a small, round ball, one to one and one-half inches in diameter, was shaped between the hands out of clay, sand, lime, ashes or hair, and baked until it was smooth and hard. When cool, it was often painted with red or yellow ochre. The ball was held between the fore and middle fingers, as shown in Figure 69, and spun on a smooth patch of ground or a flat piece of wood.⁷¹

Two or three players of either sex competed, each attempting to make their ball spin for the greatest length of time.

In this area, and in central Australia, the stick was often removed from a round top and the body of the top used as a spin ball.⁷²

The natives around Warrina also used their spin balls for a game which Worsnop⁷³ likened to bowls:

. . . the bowler . . . attempted to strike the other ball, no matter how far distant. If he accomplished this he had the right to bowl again from a stated point . . . when his opponent followed. Should there be a miss the first again returned to the point; should he likewise miss the other then bowled from point.⁷⁴

⁷⁰Read, op. cit., p. 86.

⁷¹Roth, op. cit., p. 509.

⁷²Kennedy, loc. cit.

⁷³T. Worsnop, The Prehistoric Arts, Manufactures, Works, Weapons, etc., of the Aborigines of Australia (Adelaide: Government Printing Office, 1897), p. 165.

⁷⁴Ibid.

One unusual form of spin ball was played by the aborigines of Queensland's Lower Tully River. A small gourd was selected, two holes

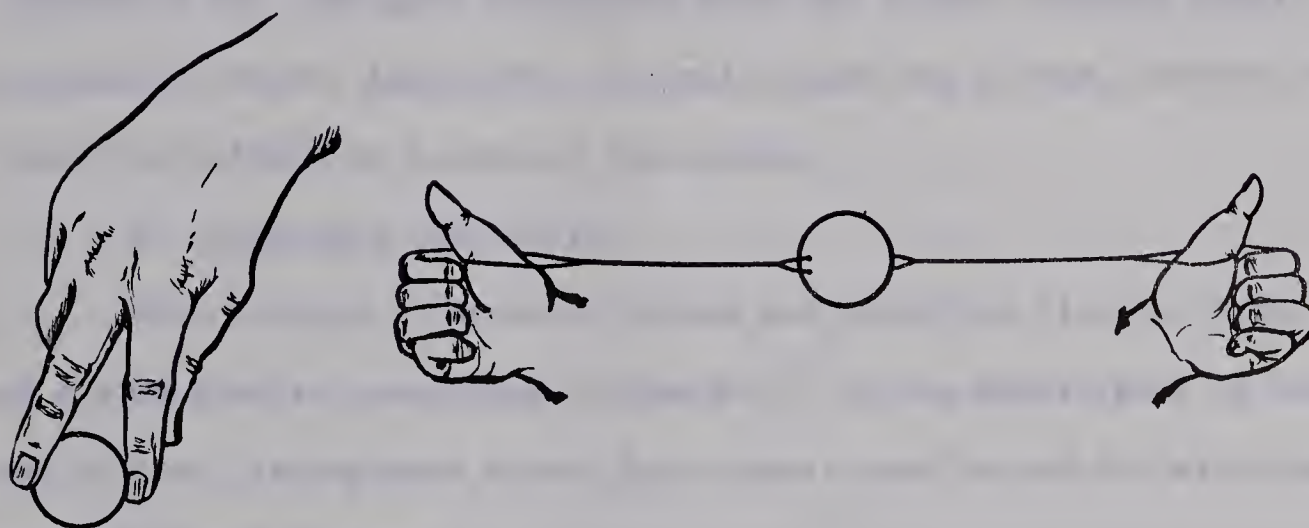


FIGURE 69

FIGURE 70

VARIATIONS OF SPIN BALL⁷⁵

drilled on either side, and an endless string passed through the holes. The thumbs were then inserted into the loops, and the string twisted by rotating the ball, as shown in Figure 70.

"The hands are then more extended, and the doubled string untwirls the ball; the hands are again approximated with the ball twirling in a reverse direction"⁷⁶ In this manner, the ball was kept spinning for considerable periods of time.

The game, known as ngor-go after the gourd from which the ball was made, was played mainly by the women.

⁷⁵Roth, op. cit., Plate XXXII.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 509-510.

D. Kolap (Dexterity)

This game, described by Haddon,⁷⁷ was played in the Torres Strait Islands. Two men sat about fourteen yards apart, each with a mat in front of him. Each man had four beans, which he attempted to throw onto his opponent's mat. The game terminated when one player recorded twenty successful throws. Apparently, a similar game was played, whereby the competitors threw at a mark on the ground.

E. Hand-Ball (Dexterity)

The children on Bathurst Island and along the Victoria River played a game similar, according to Basedow,⁷⁸ to the modern game of tennis. Two players, facing each other, hit a small seed to and fro with the palms of their hands.

This same game was played in north-western Australia, however the players hit the larger wooden fruits of the pandanus tree back and forth, with flat pieces of wood.⁷⁹

F. Tip-Cat (Dexterity)

The boys of the Arunndta and Aluridja tribes laid out on the ground small cylindrical sticks, sharpened at both ends. Taking a longer stick, they hit one end of the small piece of wood, making it bounce into the air. As it rose into the air, they again hit it, each player

⁷⁷Haddon, op. cit., p. 313.

⁷⁸Basedow, op. cit., p. 77.

⁷⁹Ibid.

attempting to drive the small object further than his opponent.⁸⁰

G. Swimming and Diving (Dexterity)

Before looking at some of the aboriginal water games, reference should be made to swimming in general. Both Hassell⁸¹ and Thomas⁸² reported that in southern and Western Australia, the art of swimming was unknown, and, as a result, the natives never entered the water for pleasure. The Tasmanian aboriginals apparently were an exception, for Roth states that "some of the men, unlike the women, were not always good swimmers though most of them were perfect."⁸³

Mitchell, commenting on their style of swimming, said, "these people swim, differently from the Europeans; generally back foremost, and nearly upright, as if treading water."⁸⁴ Other witnesses⁸⁵ have indicated that the aborigines had little difficulty in swimming with one hand, while pushing or holding an object above their heads with

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 78.

⁸¹E. Hassell, "Notes on the ethnology of the Wheelman tribe of Southwestern Australia," Anthropos, D. S. Davidson, editor, 31:692, 1936.

⁸²N. W. Thomas, "Australian Canoes and Rafts," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 35:56, 1905.

⁸³H. L. Roth, The Aborigines of Tasmania (Halifax, England: F. King and Sons, 1899), p. 159.

⁸⁴T. L. Mitchell, Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia, with descriptions of the recently Explored Region of Australia Felix, and the present colony of New South Wales, Vol. I (London: T. and W. Boone, 1838), p. 270.

⁸⁵Roth, loc. cit.; and Plomley, op. cit., p. 139.

the other.

It is interesting to note that a form of artificial respiration, similar to the now practised "mouth to nose" method, was developed by these people. One native, describing a water mishap, stated that the victim was revived by an old woman who ". . . sucked her nose and pressed her body . . . rolled her round to get the water away"86

Evidence exists to indicate that the youngsters of many northern tribes were taught to swim.

The Brisbane natives simply threw their children into the water, forcing them to make their own way back to the shore. The adults always remained nearby in case of emergency.⁸⁷

In the Nulakun tribe, however, the youngsters received at least one formal swimming lesson. Working in a group, ". . . each child would hold its hand over its nose and bob its head beneath the clear waters,"88 and remain there until a clap from the teacher signalled them to surface. After this first lesson, aimed at overcoming their fear of the water, the children joined their mothers. They were then gradually taken into deeper water, and instructed in the art of diving and swimming underwater.

Petrie recalls that, when playing in the water, the aborigines

⁸⁶W. E. Harney, Brimming Billabongs (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1963), p. 43.

⁸⁷Petrie, op. cit., pp. 112-113.

⁸⁸W. E. Harney, Tales from the Aborigines (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1959), p. 140.

frequently ". . . try their swimming powers in a race,"⁸⁹ and conducted competitions to determine which one was able to remain submerged for the greatest period of time. Haddon⁹⁰ was impressed with the underwater endurance of Torres Strait Islanders, and Smyth, timing the Goulburn River natives, found that they ". . . could remain underwater from one minute 50 seconds to two minutes" ⁹¹

Often handfulls of white objects, pebbles or bones were collected and thrown into water about ten feet deep. When the objects had settled on the bottom, the players plunged into the water to retrieve them, each attempting to gather, and bring to the surface, more than his opponent.⁹²

It should be noted that there was possibly some relationship between competitions of this nature, and certain of their economic pursuits.

H. Plunging from a Height (Vertigo)

This contest was conducted by the Bloomfield River aborigines.⁹³

⁸⁹Petrie, op. cit., p. 112.

⁹⁰A. C. Haddon, "The Ethnography of the Western Tribe of Torres Straits," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 19:386, 1890.

⁹¹R. B. Smyth, The Aborigines of Victoria: with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other parts of Australia and Tasmania, compiled from various sources for the government of Victoria, Vol. II (Melbourne: Government Printing Office, 1878), p. 247.

⁹²Petrie, loc. cit.

⁹³W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:489, 1903.

Selecting a suitable water-hole, the contestants, in turn, leaped feet first into the water from a designated height. After all had jumped, the players moved to a higher point and plunged in again. This continued, with the competitors climbing to a higher point for each jump, until the distance above the water was so great that only one competitor had courage enough to leap.

I. Guessing Game (Chance, Enigma)

A game played by the natives, both young and old, of Cape Bedford, was similar to the European game of "I Spy". One member of the group, noticing ". . . a new flower just in blossom, a bird half hidden in a bush, a tussock of grass uprooted, etc., and, taking care to look in quite a contrary direction . . ." ⁹⁴ challenged the group to guess the object in question. No hints were given, and each player, in turn, attempted to guess. The correct guess was accompanied by laughter all round.

On the island of Mer, the group was given two syllables, or the last syllable of a person's name. From this, the preceding syllables had to be guessed and the whole name voiced, ". . . thus 'ia?' 'Elia.'" ⁹⁵

Children of the same island often collected a number of small items and hid them in their closed hands. The remaining players were

⁹⁴W. E. Roth, "Games, sports and amusements," North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 4 (Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 17.

⁹⁵A. C. Haddon, (ed.), Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, 4:314, 1912.

then asked to guess the correct number of objects.⁹⁶

J. Quivering (Dexterity)

Worsnop⁹⁷ recalls that the native girls occasionally indulged in contests in which they made the fleshy part of their thighs quiver. The girl who was able to continue this action for the greatest period of time was declared the winner. It was apparently quite common for some of the girls to be able to continue doing this for as long as twelve minutes.

A similar type of contest was recorded by Hassell:

Two men faced one, or three would face two . . . in the middle of a circle. After a few words each, with his arms across his chest, stood on one leg and made the muscles of his thigh and calf stand out and quiver The men on the outside made no noise except a satisfied grunt when one contestant outlasted the others.⁹⁸

This particular contest, however, may not be related to the first as it was conducted during the course of a corroboree, and therefore it may have had some other significance.

K. Running (Pursuit)

Foot racing was common among the aboriginal boys and men, according to Smith,⁹⁹ however the contestants did not train in any way for these events. On Bathurst Island, Basedow¹⁰⁰ witnessed the children

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Worsnop, op. cit., p. 166.

⁹⁸Hassell, op. cit., p. 697.

⁹⁹W. R. Smith, Myths and Legends of the Australian Aboriginals (London: George G. Harrap and Company, 1930), p. 238.

¹⁰⁰H. Basedow, "Notes on the Natives of Bathurst Island, North Australia," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great

competing in long jump competitions, as well as foot races.

Several authors,¹⁰¹ however, feel that competitions of this nature were probably introduced by the missionaries. The idea of running between two points, in an attempt to defeat the other participants, was alien to the aborigines. It was common for the leading runner to decide the course of the race, with the event taking the form of "follow the leader". Such events were usually spontaneous and finished when the competitors decided to stop. Duguid¹⁰² states that the leaders tended to wait for their slower playmates to come alongside before running on again.

The Bathurst Island children, on a windy day, collected ". . . the light globular seed-heads of the 'spring rolling grass' (Spinifex hirsutis) . . . take them to the beach and there release them on the hardened sand."¹⁰³ The players allowed the seeds to be driven ahead some distance by the wind, before running after and attempting to pick them up in a "cow-boy" fashion, without lessening their speed.

TEAM GAMES

A. Catch-Ball (Pursuit, Dexterity, Strategy)

Various types of catch-ball were played by the Australian

Britain and Ireland, 48:311, 1913.

¹⁰¹W. E. Roth, "Games, Sports and Amusements of the Northern Queensland Aborigines," Report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 9:520, 1903; and Duguid, op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Basedow, loc. cit.

aboriginal tribes.

In general, sex was no barrier and any person who wished to participate being eligible to join the game.

Before the commencement of intra-tribal games, sides were chosen and leaders selected. Howitt¹⁰⁴ recalls that many of the Victorian tribes selected their teams so that different classes, totems or clans competed against each other.

When inter-tribal matches were conducted, the tribe's best player was appointed captain.¹⁰⁵ Such contests were sometimes refereed by an impartial member of a third tribe.¹⁰⁶

In most cases, one team simply threw the ball back and forth between its members, while the opposing team attempted to intercept it. In the north-western districts of Queensland, the interception had to be made while the players were in the air. Locally, this game was referred to as "Kangaroo-play",¹⁰⁷ because the antics of the competitors resembled a kangaroo in flight.

A similar type of game, known as Boogalah, was played by the Euahlayi tribe.¹⁰⁸ The ball was thrown into the air, and the player making

¹⁰⁴A. W. Howitt, The Native Tribes of South-East Australia (London: Macmillan and Company, 1904), p. 770.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.; and Smith, op. cit., p. 240.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Roth, op. cit., p. 508.

¹⁰⁸Parker, loc. cit.

the catch led his, or her, team into the centre of the playing area. With the opposition circling the players in the centre, the ball was again thrown high into the air. If it happened to fall outside the central area and be caught by the circling team, the two sides changed places. The team which retained the ball in the centre area for the greatest period of time won the game.

On the island of Mabuiag in the Torres Strait, the children paired off with a member of the opposite sex to play a type of catch-ball. The players then ". . . go in pairs into the sea, a boy tries to throw a bean to another boy which his partner attempts to intercept; should she succeed she in turn throws it to another girl and her partner tries to forestall her."¹⁰⁹

Smith¹¹⁰ maintains that the games of catch-ball usually lasted until one team became tired of playing. In some cases, however, the game lasted all day and was occasionally continued the following morning.

Commenting on the aborigines' catching ability, Basedow wrote, "it is surprising . . . that despite the quickness of their eyes and the keenness of their sight, the natives, as a rule, are very backward at catching with their hands any object which is thrown at them."¹¹¹

Three main types of balls appeared to be used for these games.

¹⁰⁹Haddon, op. cit., p. 313.

¹¹⁰Smith, loc. cit. .

¹¹¹H. Basedow, The Australian Aboriginal (Adelaide: F. W. Pierce and Sons, 1925), p. 78.

The most common was a kangaroo's scrotum filled with grass¹¹² or fur,¹¹³ or a piece of kangaroo skin filled with grass and sewn together with sinew.¹¹⁴

Similar in nature was an opossum skin bag sewn around tightly wound strips of skin,¹¹⁵ or an animal skin rolled into a ball and tied with twine.¹¹⁶

The northern Australian natives used the seeds of such plants as the Pandanus, Zamia and Macrozamia Macdonelli,¹¹⁷ while the Torres Strait Islanders used the fruit of a Kai tree or a Mucuna bean¹¹⁸ to play their games of catch-ball.

It should be mentioned that, in most areas, the local name for this game was the same as the name of the ball.

B. Football (Dexterity, Strategy, Pursuit)

Several different games in which a ball was kicked with the foot

¹¹²Howitt, loc. cit.; and Etheridge, loc. cit.

¹¹³Basedow, op. cit., pp. 77-78.

¹¹⁴Petrie, op. cit., p. 109; A. H. Campbell, et. al., The Aborigines and Torres Islanders of Queensland (Brisbane: Western Suburbs Branch United Nations Association, 1958), p. 11; and S. Gason, "Of the Tribes, Dieyerie, Auminie, Yandrawontha, Yarawuarka, Pilladapa, Lat. 31°0'S, Long. 138°55'E," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 24:174, 1895.

¹¹⁵Howitt, loc. cit.; and McCarthy, loc. cit.

¹¹⁶Roth, loc. cit.

¹¹⁷Basedow, loc. cit.

¹¹⁸Haddon, loc. cit.

have been recorded.

One of these games was similar to soccer, in that the hands could not be used to touch the ball once the match had commenced. This game, however, was not played within any defined area, nor were any goals used. Teams, often comprising of up to fifty players each,¹¹⁹ were selected from different moieties and leaders appointed.

In the Northern Territory, the game commenced with the ball being kicked high into the air. The players then endeavoured to keep the ball from their opponents, by kicking it back and forth between each other.¹²⁰

Dawson¹²¹ reported that, in southern New South Wales, the two teams lined up facing each other, and the game was begun by throwing the ball between them. "The side which kicks it oftenest and furthest gains the game. The person who sends it highest is considered the best player, and has the honour of burying it in the ground till required next day."¹²²

In both these regions, this game was played only by the men.

Among some of the southern tribes, a slightly different game of football was played.

¹¹⁹ Dawson, loc. cit.

¹²⁰ W. E. Harney, "Sport and play amidst the Aborigines of the Northern Territory," Mankind, No. 9, 4:378, November, 1952.

¹²¹ Dawson, loc. cit.

¹²² Ibid.

Teams, sometimes comprising of up to one hundred players, were selected and captains appointed.¹²³ The sides then lined up, or stood in a ring,¹²⁴ and the ball was kicked high into the air. In tribes where the females were permitted to play, it was a woman who was given the privilege of starting the game.¹²⁵ In other areas, the honour was bestowed on the most notable player.¹²⁶

As soon as the ball was in the air, the two teams rushed to catch it. "Some of them leap as high as five feet or more from the ground to catch the ball."¹²⁷ The player catching the ball had the choice of kicking it back into the air himself, or passing it on to a team member for him to kick.

The objective of the game varied slightly between tribes. In Victoria, the team catching the ball the greatest number of times won the game,¹²⁸ while in New South Wales and South Australia, the teams endeavoured to keep the ball in the air, and away from their opponents, for as long as possible.¹²⁹

¹²³Beveridge, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

¹²⁴W. A. Cawthorne, "Rough Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Natives," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch, 27:55, 1927.

¹²⁵Beveridge, loc. cit.

¹²⁶Smyth, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 176.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Worsnop, op. cit., p. 165.

¹²⁹Cawthorne, loc. cit.; and Beveridge, loc. cit.

Like catch-ball, this game, too, often lasted for many hours.

The most commonly used ball was one fashioned out of an opossum skin bag, filled with crushed charcoal,¹³⁰ or a tightly rolled skin.¹³¹ The ball was then tied or sewn together with sinews.

The natives at Coranderrk made their balls from ". . . twine formed of the twisted hair of the opossum."¹³²

Two unusual footballs have been recorded. The first, seen by Harney¹³³ in the Northern Territory, was fashioned from grass, tied together with string and coated with beeswax. The other, found in Victoria, consisted of a portion of a kangaroo's intestines, inflated with air.¹³⁴

In general, all of these balls were about the size of a tennis ball.

C. Hockey (Pursuit, Dexterity, Strategy)

The natives of the Torres Strait Islands and south-western Australia played a game that resembled field hockey.

On the mainland, players of the Wheelman tribe¹³⁵ used a short piece of marlock, with a burnt root at one end, for a stick, and a

¹³⁰Dawson, loc. cit.

¹³¹Beveridge, loc. cit.

¹³²Smyth, loc. cit.

¹³³Harney, loc. cit.

¹³⁴Worsnop, loc. cit.

¹³⁵Hassell, op. cit., pp. 686-687.

wooden ball covered with clay and hardened in the fire. The Torres Strait Islanders hit a wooden ball, up to three inches in diameter and ten ounces in weight, with a bamboo stick as long as thirty-three inches.¹³⁶ This stick frequently had a grip cut into its upper surface.

No restriction was placed on the size of a team, with any male or female who desired being permitted to play. On Mabuiag Island, the married men sometimes competed against the unmarried males.¹³⁷

In both areas, the game had no rules nor were goals used.

"The game is very 'fast' and causes intense excitement and a tremendous noise"¹³⁸

A match usually lasted until one team became tired of playing. Hassell¹³⁹ stated that, in the Wheelman tribe, the game was sometimes played by all members for six or seven days in succession.

A variation of this game was played by the Pitta-Pitta tribe of Queensland.¹⁴⁰ Two teams, consisting of four to six men each, positioned themselves about fifteen to twenty yards apart. The members of both groups, all armed with sticks, stood one behind the other, with a distance of three to four feet separating each of them.

A stone ball was thrown alternately from one side to the other.

¹³⁶Haddon, op. cit., p. 312.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Hassell, loc. cit.

¹⁴⁰Roth, op. cit., p. 509; and McCarthy, loc. cit.

Each individual, in turn, attempted to intercept it with his stick as it rolled or bounced along the ground towards him.

Several facts become apparent in reviewing this chapter.

The majority of these games and pastimes were enjoyed by both the young and old of either sex. While many of the activities were of a semi-passive nature, about half could be described as being physically vigorous.

Similarly, about half of the play activities required the construction of specific instruments of play. The remainder centered around, or employed items of natural phenomena - fire, water, earth or vegetation.

Play in and around the water was very popular with tribes living near bodies of water, however of all the activities described here, the various types of ball play were the most widespread.

A breakdown of games and pastimes of social interaction and the associated characteristics of each are presented in Table VI. The following abbreviations are used:

C	Chance	I	Imitation
D	Dexterity	P	Pursuit
E	Enigma	S	Strategy
e	Exultation	V	Vertigo

TABLE VI
THE CHARACTERISTICS AND FREQUENCY OF GAMES AND PASTIMES
ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL INTERACTION

GROUP PASTIMES	C	D	E	e	I	P	S	V
Swinging								x
Skipping		x						

TABLE VI (continued)

	C	D	E	e	I	P	S	V
Splashing				x				
Mud sliding								x
Tobogganing								x
Playing in the sand				x				
"Fireworks"				x				
Miniature "kaili"		x						
GROUP GAMES								
Smoke spirals		x						
Top spinning		x						
Spin ball		x						
Kolap		x						
Hand-ball		x						
Tip-cat		x						
Swimming and diving		x						
Plunging from a height								x
Guessing game	x		x					
Quivering		x						
Running						x		
TEAM GAMES								
Catch-ball		x				x	x	
Football		x				x	x	
Hockey		x				x	x	

Total Play Activities Associated With Social Interaction

Pastimes

Individual - Nil

Group - 8

Games

Group - 11

Team - 3

Frequency of Predominant Play Characteristics

Dexterity - 13

Pursuit - 4

Vertigo - 4

Strategy - 3

Exultation - 3

Chance - 1

Enigma - 1

Imitation - Nil

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The objectives of this study were to classify the games and pastimes of the Australian aboriginal according to the predominant characteristics exhibited, and to categorize them with respect to the major aspects of this culture.

Study of the relevant literature revealed ninety-four different play activities, of which ten were classified as individual pastimes, forty-two as group pastimes, thirty-three as group games and nine as team games. It should be borne in mind that many variations of the games and pastimes described in the preceding chapters have been excluded, therefore rendering the tallies flexible. The existing figures, however, indicate that the natives' leisure time was spent predominantly in a group situation, in which the players participated in activities of both a competitive and non-competitive nature.

In viewing aspects of the aboriginal culture, it was discovered that twenty-nine play activities were either directly or indirectly associated with economic pursuits, thirteen with political activities, nine with the domestic aspects of life, eight with his ceremonial rites, thirteen with cultural identification and twenty-two with social interaction.

The majority of these play activities, with the exception of those revolving around the political and domestic spheres of life, were enjoyed by natives of either sex, both young and old. Participation according

to age and sex, however, appeared to be determined by the individual's tribal responsibilities. As defence was primarily the responsibility of the men, political play was dominated by the males, the boys learning and the men reinforcing their skills. Similarly, pastimes associated with domestic activities were enjoyed mainly by the females.

Each member of the tribe had a specific role in the economic and ceremonial life of the community. This role was subsequently reflected in their economic and ceremonial play, the males indulging in the more vigorous activities and the females in activities of a semi-passive nature.

Of the games and pastimes recorded, forty-four required dexterity on the part of the player, thirty-four involved imitation, twelve were activities of pursuit, twelve involved simple strategy, eleven were played for the exultation they afforded, eight involved enigma and eight exhibited an element of vertigo. It is interesting to note that only five activities involved elements of chance, none of which was associated with gambling. While the majority of games and pastimes portrayed only one main characteristic, several exhibited two or more characteristics. The latter is particularly evident in some of their team games.

Play revolving around social interaction and political and economic pursuits, generally required considerable dexterity on the part of the participant, while that associated with cultural identification and domestic and ceremonial life, was largely imitative in nature. Imitation also played an important role in many of the economic games and pastimes.

The absence of the more sophisticated form of play, the team game,

is apparent, particularly with relation to ceremonial activities and cultural identification. Except in isolated instances, the aborigines placed little emphasis on victory in a game. According to Beveridge, they:

. . . do not award any trophies for superiority in their various games; even the historical 'pickle parsley for their pains' is not given, therefore the victors have to content themselves with a consciousness of their superiority¹

From this it could be surmised that the natives valued cooperation more than competition.

Generally speaking, the games, pastimes and toys of these people, serving both educational and recreational ends, evolved from their daily tasks and the physical phenomena with which they lived. Several exceptions, however, are found among the play activities classified under social interaction. These activities and their accompanying playthings were often constructed solely for the game or pastime in question.

A large percentage of the play activities discussed in this study were recorded in north-eastern Australia and the adjacent islands. The material revealed that elsewhere on the continent, as the distance from this region increased, the number of leisure-time activities not only decreased, but became less sophisticated. Whether this is a result of a lack of early research, environmental conditions, or non-indigenous games and pastimes gradually infiltrating into north-eastern Australia and then radiating out over the continent, is a matter of conjecture at this stage.

¹P. Beveridge, "On the Aborigines inhabiting the Great Lacustrine and Riverine Depression of the Lower Murray, Lower Murrumbidgee, Lower Lachlan and Lower Darling," Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales, 17:55, 1883.

The problem, however, could well serve as a basis of future research in this area.

This study reveals several interesting facts that could be considered and analysed by physical educators, before attempting to formulate a philosophy of sport.

The more important aspects are:

1. The games of the aboriginals appear to have been played solely for the enjoyment they afforded.

2. In most areas, victory in a game was of minor importance, and only rarely was any form of trophy awarded to the winner.

3. Participation was close to maximum in that all who wished to participate were welcomed.

4. Although a certain amount of skill was desirable for most games, the lack of emphasis on winning permitted the less skillful to participate in, and enjoy the activity.

5. Game rules were few, and simple enough to be understood by players of all ages.

6. The attitude of the players was such that the majority of games was played without an official.

7. A large percentage of the play activities were of a group nature rather than of a team type, thus, while competition was present, it did not dominate play.

8. Play activities were used to solidify internal relationships and promote goodwill and social intercourse externally.

9. Play had a definite place and function in the aboriginal

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culture. It served as a respite from work and as a medium through which the values considered important to the aboriginal could be learned.

Their play then, like their culture, was relatively simple with the basic rewards being enjoyment and self-satisfaction.

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to the study of the properties of the function $f(x)$ defined by the equation $f(x) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} a_n x^n$, where $a_n = \frac{1}{n!}$. It is shown that $f(x)$ is an entire function and that $f(x) = e^x$.
2. The second part of the paper is devoted to the study of the properties of the function $g(x)$ defined by the equation $g(x) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} b_n x^n$, where $b_n = \frac{1}{n!}$. It is shown that $g(x)$ is an entire function and that $g(x) = e^x$.
3. The third part of the paper is devoted to the study of the properties of the function $h(x)$ defined by the equation $h(x) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} c_n x^n$, where $c_n = \frac{1}{n!}$. It is shown that $h(x)$ is an entire function and that $h(x) = e^x$.

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